



How the Elders View Impeachment

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FOR PURPOSES of practical political analysis, ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of what is currently being said about the President's political future is the opposite of the old soap advertisement's claim. In other words, this huge proportion of the clamor is impure in one way or another; and it can be ignored.

In any tribe or nation, however, it is never safe to turn a deaf ear when the elders speak. In the President's own party, no veteran in the Senate is so respected as the independent-minded Vermonter, George Aiken. In either party in the House, no single member is so respected as the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Representative Wilbur Mills of Arkansas.

Both these elders spoke out the last week, and what they said deserves far closer attention than it has yet received. This is all the more true, because they seemed to say quite different things; yet much the same conclusions have to be drawn from the Aiken statement and the informal Mills press conference, both on November 7.

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SENATOR AIKEN, characteristically, started by reciting some currently fashionable views. For example, he mocked the very notion of a President of the United States prosecuting himself, through the medium of a "special prosecutor." But

the nub of his statement lies in just two points. He said the President ought not to resign. But he added that the House of Representatives ought to set itself the shortest possible deadline for voting for or against a bill of impeachment.

"Either impeach (the President) or get off his back," was Aiken's culminating message — to which the Senator added that he expected no impeachment. Representative Mills, in contrast, told his interviewers that he had come to think the President would probably be "forced to resign."

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MEANWHILE, YOU can reconcile the Aiken statement and the Mills interview by asking yourself a single, simple question: what will the President then do, if the House actually votes a bill of impeachment? Will he expose the country and himself to the horrors of a presidential impeachment trial by the present frivolous, divided and partisan Senate? Will he take this kind of risk for the country in a time that he regards as deadly dangerous?

Will the President resign when this situation faces him, in short; or will he "tough it out," when doing so begins to mean acute peril for the U.S. as a whole? Given the President's strong national-mindedness, the foregoing question is all but self-answering.