

The 1974 Elections: Despair Among Republicans

Republicans in Congress facing the congressional elections in 1974 are alarmed almost to the point of panic over their fate. Personal soundings, polls, every possible indicator point to disaster.

With "Operation Candor" and the farce of the tapes serving to widen the credibility gap, these beleaguered men and women are talking about how the President can best help their chances. Many believe the greatest service he could perform would be to leave the office. With the confirmation of Gerald Ford as Vice President, his succession to the presidency would satisfy most Republicans and give the party a new look.

Rumors circulate of a new bombshell with an explosive charge greater than that of the mysterious gap in the critical tape of the Nixon-Haldeman discussion of the Watergate break-in. The rumors have it that missing documents, if they can be dredged up by Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, will show an even closer link between the President and the Watergate cover-up. While it is still only a whisper in the

cloakrooms, the growing belief is that at some point in the near future Republican leaders will descend on the White House in the utmost privacy. They will tell the President he has no choice but to resign if the party is to escape ruin with Nixon loyalists facing certain defeat. After the almost certain rout of 1974 with Democratic majorities in Senate and House sufficient to override any Nixon veto, 1976 will be a question mark.

Such a delegation would necessarily include party conservatives with Sen. Barry Goldwater in the forefront. Goldwater has been remarkably candid in recent weeks on the credibility gap and the way it has engulfed the White House. Whether the President would rebut this demand as he had brushed off the clamor in the media for his resignation, no one can say.

The creaking delay in the impeachment process is one reason for the growing conviction among Republicans in Congress that resignation is the only way out. The House Judiciary Committee charged with the inquiry into whether grounds for Articles of Impeachment exist will take well into

February and perhaps March before any conclusion is reached. Should the House vote Articles of Impeachment, the Senate would be required to proceed with a trial that could take several months.

In the interval the White House and the Republican National Committee are directing a strenuous campaign to revive the President's hold on the office, if not his personal image. The White House sessions with members of Congress are only a part of the campaign and thus far they seem to have produced little but more doubt.

Newspaper ads calling for support of the President are being placed around the country. The National Committee says these are largely spontaneous efforts by local Republicans although the committee has furnished sample ads. The National Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, headed by Rabbi Bernard Korff, has placed a number of appeals and they serve other groups as a model. Rallies for support of Nixon have been organized in Los Angeles, Washington, Oklahoma City and other centers.

Majority Leader Mike Mansfield says ads appearing in newspapers in his home state of Montana have influenced the mail he receives. Although the volume is nothing like as heavy as it was after the Saturday Night massacre, it is now running at about 50-50 for impeachment or resignation on the one hand and for support for Nixon on the other.

Like a cat with nine lives Nixon may survive this crisis as he has survived the others in his troubled past. That is the view of senior senators canvassed by this reporter. Certainly his present crisis is of a magnitude adding up to those he describes in his book "Six Crises."

The despair over 1974 is undeniable. In the House 192 Republicans are up for re-election with the exception of a half dozen who have already declared their intention to retire. On the Senate side, 15 Republicans are up. They must all operate do-it-yourself campaigns since national money is drying up and a President so deeply mired can help most by staying out of the campaign.