

Chance for survival

The President faces his bleakest political year. If he survives it, there is little doubt he will complete his term.

Sometime soon he will experience the agony of becoming the second President in the country's nearly 200 years of life to face an impeachment process in the House of Representatives.

Over his protests, certain portions of the Watergate tapes probably will be aired by the media — either by court order or the sieve-like leaks that are now as much a part of Washington as its sewage system.

The oil and unemployment squeezes will hang over him like the wraith of the depression draped the head of Herbert Hoover.

As the fall elections draw near he will come under heavier pressure to step down so that fellow Republicans can step up.

Friends and appointees of his first term — some with their backs to prison walls — will point a finger at him in the hope of obtaining clemency.

If the going gets much tougher around the White House others will flee to the hills.

All these things and more will be called upon to bear in a year that was scheduled to be the beginning of a happy homestretch with no opponent breathing on his neck.

What can un-cross his stars?

When a man's in a slump, and in the President's case that slump has amounted to a 40 point drop in his popularity, nothing pans out for him. The most innocent and honest acts blow up in his face like an explosive cigar.

What was evil about taking a commercial plane to California for the Christmas holidays? Many thousands did just that. Yet,

one Washington columnist condemned him because he didn't stand in line with the other passengers and submit to ticket counter delays and an X-ray frisk. What was shady about naming his wife to the new 25-member National Voluntary Service Advisory Council? Dozens of politicians' wives are on public payrolls around the country, and at much more income than Pat would have been paid for her sporadic consultant work. But in Mrs. Nixon's case, her husband's booboo was a front page story.

Now that good men like Bill Rogers, Mel Laird, Herb Klein, Elliot Richardson, Bryce Harlow and others have left him, or been driven away, he finds himself reduced to two sorely inhibited spokesmen, Jerry Warren and Ron Ziegler, and the general who took Bob Haldeman's place as White House chief of staff, Alexander Haig. The President apparently doesn't communicate very seriously with either Warren or Ziegler any more. And as for Gen. Haig, he seems to communicate only with Kohoutek, or something.

For example, he said recently, "neither the President nor his staff are the least bit self-conscious about what the administration has done for this country and for the ordinary citizen in it. In any other time, without Watergate, this is what the American people would be saying." *

Sure, but that's like saying, "Abel wouldn't have been that much of a hero, if it hadn't been for Cain." Or "the Titanic would still be in service if it hadn't been for that darned iceberg." Or "the Japanese would never have been forced to build all those cars, TV sets, transistors, cameras and textiles, if they hadn't bombed Pearl Harbor."

What the President needs most in 1974 is advice from a good old rotten Tammany politician.

Guy Wright returns tomorrow

*SFC 31 Dec 73 [WXP] Lou Cannon