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House Southerners Not United on Nixon

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REP. BOB CASEY
. . . "we're a grand jury"

REP. BILL ALEXANDER
. . . "I can go either way"

Conservative Southern Democrats in the House cannot be counted on to vote as a solid bloc against impeachment of President Nixon when the issue comes up later this year.

Talks with more than a dozen of the 50 or so conservatives who so often have formed a coalition with Republicans behind the President on legislative matters generally produced these responses:

None is prepared to vote for impeachment now. Virtually all said they would do so if firm evidence is produced of wrongdoing by the President in Watergate or other matters. And after talking with voters at home, their feeling was that politically they can survive either way they vote.

Rep. Walter B. Jones (D-N.C.) said his voters in eastern North Carolina couldn't relate to Watergate but became very upset when they read that the President paid only $792 in federal income taxes for 1970 while he was taking a deduction for donation of his vice presidential papers to the nation.

"They could relate to that," said Jones. "The very day there is positive evidence that he violated his oath to uphold the Constitution and faithfully carry out the laws I would have no choice but to vote for impeachment . . . As of this moment the evidence is not present."

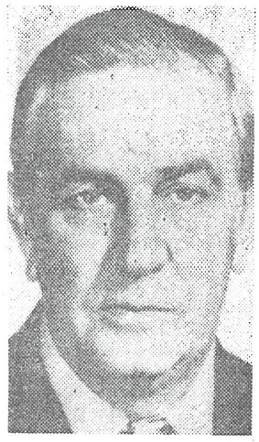
Rep. Bob Casey (D-Tex.) said, "We're a grand jury." This is a statement made by many members, meaning they want to wait for the evidence and then vote on it. Impeachment is like a grand jury indictment which would be tried by the Senate. "I don't like the idea," said Casey, "but if the facts are there we have to bite the bullet and do it. People say get off his back. We didn't put it on his back."

Rep. Bill Alexander (D-Ark.), a relative moderate from conservative northeastern Arkansas, said: "I have to be persuaded by the evidence. I can go either way depending on the evidence."

Alexander observed that a year ago the idea that the President of the United States could be guilty of "high crimes" and merit impeachment and removal from office was "unmentionable" in most places, in part because the American people had inherited the notion that a President, like a king, is "all-good" and can do no wrong.

"By his inaction, his fail-

See BLOC, A4, Col. 1



REP. WALTER B. JONES
. . . "evidence not present"

REP. JOHN J. FLYNT
. . . "if I see evidence"

BLOC, From A1

ure to present evidence," Mr. Nixon has "overcome that presumption of innocence," said Alexander. "The question now is: is he worthy of being our President?"

Alexander said one constituent told him: "If the President is innocent, Congress should help him; if he's guilty Congress should hang him."

Rep. John J. Flynt (D-Ga.), an economic conservative but one of the first Southerners to turn against the Indochina war, said his voters are mixed on impeachment, but that "most people would like to see him resign because they think the government will be paralyzed as long as he is there.

"If I see evidence of the commission or prior knowledge of a crime, I could vote to impeach. I have seen no evidence yet. This is one of the few issues on which I feel the political climate at home should not be a factor."

Rep. Phil Landrum (D-Ga.) said he wanted to wait to see if the House Judiciary Committee inquiry can produce evidence to support charges against the President.

Landrum said that before he could vote for impeachment he would have to be "reasonably sure" that the President had committed a criminal act.

Several Southerners shared Landrum's requirement for a high level of proof. On the other hand, many of the President's critics would settle for a finding that there was "reasonable cause" to believe that the President had committed or condoned acts that undermined the integrity of government though not necessarily indictable.

"I'm not going to vote to send it to the Senate for trial just to clear the atmosphere," said Landrum.

Rep. Thomas N. Downing (D-Va.) of Newport News said he would make no judgment until the Judiciary Committee reports, but added that "I feel perfectly free to vote either way." His mail has been running heavily against the President.

Rep. Joe D. Waggonner (D-La.), perhaps the closest to Mr. Nixon of all House Democrats, said his people "don't know anything now that the President should be impeached for. They expect me to vote as the situation is when we vote. I assume he is innocent."

Waggonner, leader of Southern conservatives, said there has been no talk of forming a Southern bloc against impeachment.

Rep. Charles E. Bennett (D-Fla.) said he took the approach of an open-minded grand juror. He first told a reporter that to vote for impeachment he must find the President guilty "beyond a reasonable doubt," but later said this might be too high a standard of proof to require.

It appeared clear from talking to members that their views have not yet jelled on what is an impeachable offense and what level of evidence they would require to vote to impeach (indict) and send the issue to the Senate for trial. A two-thirds Senate vote to convict would remove the President from office.

Three Southern Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee could provide decisive votes as to whether the committee votes to recommend for or against impeachment. All three—Reps. Walter Flowers (D-Ala.), Ray Thorton (D-Ark.) and James R. Mann (D-S.C.)—took the position that they are grand jurors who will reserve judgment until they hear the evidence.

Flowers said: "I think I can exercise independent judgment. Politically I can survive either way."

Thornton said: "I'm going to make my decision based on the law and the evidence."

Mann said: "I intend to keep an open mind. I think it would require more than probable cause to impeach."