

President Admits Being a Liability In GOP Campaigns

By Lou Cannon and Spencer Rich

Washington Post Staff Writers

President Nixon told Republican congressional leaders yesterday that he is aware of his political unpopularity and expects a number of GOP candidates to go it alone in this year's campaigns.

"I'm not going to be mad at anyone who campaigns independently of me," Mr. Nixon reportedly said. "I'm not asking anyone to support me or oppose me."

The President spoke at a White House meeting which Republican National Chairman George Bush said was distinguished by "frank give-and-take."

Bush said the President expressed awareness that both the energy crisis and Watergate present serious political problems and that he understands that many GOP candidates will run on their own issues.

"People in politics identify with what will help them and dis-identify with what will hurt them," Bush said. "If the President is high in the polls, Republicans will be saying, come out to my district. If not, they're going to do their own thing."

Bush's predecessor as GOP chairman, Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, said "the President's at 29 points in the polls, and that's three degrees below freezing." Dole, who is seeking re-election, was not present at the meeting. He said Republican candidates throughout the country are in "a no-win position" no matter what they said about the administration and could be expected to run independent campaigns.

Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.), emerging from the breakfast meeting at the White House, said the President expects GOP candidates to campaign on issues affecting their own districts.

Both Scott and Bush said that one issue on which Republicans could campaign is the record of the Democratic-controlled Congress. Scott called it "40 years of fiddling."

According to one participant at the meeting, neither the President nor the Republican congressmen made any attempt to conceal their concern about GOP prospects in special elections for House seats vacated by Republicans in California, Ohio and Michigan.

"The feeling is, California was good—the other two you have to fight for," said Rep. John Rousselot of California, one of those who attended the White House session.

Republicans already have suffered losses in two districts in Pennsylvania and Michigan previously represented by GOP congressmen. The Michigan loss was particularly shattering, since it occurred in Vice President Gerald R. Ford's old district, where the Democrats had not won in 64 years.

At his news conference

Monday the President expressed the view that 1974 "will be a good year for those candidates who stand for the administration."

Asked whether he would resign if it became evident that the Republican Party was going to suffer a disastrous defeat in the November elections, Mr. Nixon replied:

"No, I want my party to succeed, but more important I want the presidency to survive."

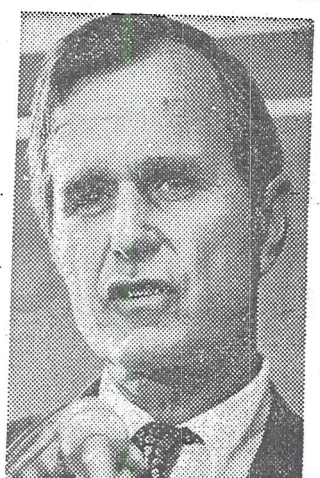
Republican congressmen of various ideologies expressed disagreement afterward with Mr. Nixon's assessment about it being "a good year" for pro-administration candidates.

Rep. Joel Broyhill of Virginia said that "Nixon himself would be the kiss of death in any campaign." Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, head of the House GOP Conference, said the President's press-conference statement would stimulate Republicans to run independently.

While the GOP leaders were meeting at the White House yesterday, Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.) again called upon the President to resign. In a speech prepared for delivery at Marquette University last night Brooke said this would avoid "the prolonged agony of impeachment proceedings" and "an unprecedented disaster for Republicans" at the polls.

The impeachment issue arose at yesterday's meeting, according to one of the participants, when congressmen urged Mr. Nixon to cooperate as much as possible with the House Judiciary Committee in its requests for information.

"The general sentiment was we would hope they'd be given whatever was rational or reasonable, that there not be an attitude of confrontation but of cooperation," this participant said. "The President said that of course we want to be reasonable, and we were assured there would be cooperation."



SEN. HUGH SCOTT

GEORGE BUSH

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