

Impeachment Drive Gets New Impetus

By Lou Cannon

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The indictment yesterday of seven former presidential aides and advisers gave new impetus in Congress to impeachment of President Nixon and dealt a further blow to an already shattered Republican Party.

"All of us have to differentiate between the party and the White House," said Rep. Tom Railsback of Illinois, a key Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee. "It's in the great interest of the party to get this thing over with. The President may not feel that way. But we've got to get it over with, one way or the other."

Railsback and three other Republican members of the committee—Robert McClory of Illinois, Charles Wiggins of California and William Cohen of Maine—said they hoped the indictments would speed release of material

to the committee from the White House and from Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

"I believe that the potential consequences are so plain to the President and his counsel that we will get the material we're asking," Wiggins said.

The indictments coincided with the findings of a Republican-sponsored poll which found Watergate the dominant issue in the election of a Democratic congressman in the heavily Republican Michigan congressional district previously represented by Gerald R. Ford.

The poll showed that 73 per cent of the voters thought that Watergate was the number one issue and that 60 per cent of the voters regarded the Republican candidate as more qualified than the Democrat.

Michigan state GOP Chairman William F. McLaughlin said that it is clear from the results that Michigan voters

were trying to "send a message" to Washington.

"Congress must bite the bullet and go one way or the other on impeachment," McLaughlin said. "Let's enforce the Constitution."

Republican officials had hoped to keep the poll a secret until after next Tuesday's special election in a Cincinnati, Ohio, congressional district. But McLaughlin confirmed the findings after portions were published by the Detroit Free Press.

The poll squarely contradicted various official Republican explanations for the defeat, among them the view that GOP voters stayed home while Democrats went to the polls.

Slightly more Republicans than Democrats voted in the election, the poll found. Ticket-splitting voters, who usually go 2-to-1 for GOP candidates in Michigan, went 2-to-1 for the Demo-

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cratic candidate and 20 per cent of the Republicans also voted for the Democrat.

McLaughlin said he didn't know what to advise Republicans to do in the next Michigan special election on April 16.

"If you stay with the President you lose ticket-splitters," McLaughlin said. "If you go away from him, you lose hard-core Republicans. I don't have an answer."

Many congressional leaders were either out of town for a long weekend or unwilling to comment publicly on the indictments beyond saying that the defendants are innocent until proven guilty.

However, Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1972, said in a Senate speech that the President's "soiled administration is now the chief threat to the presidency."

McGovern said that impeachment is "the one clear constitutional remedy for the illness that is now destroying the presidency."

There was applause and some hooting at a meeting of the Democratic National Committee when the names of the seven indicted men were read.

Democratic National Chairman Robert S. Strauss, who interrupted the proceeding to read the list, said: "I believe all of us are pleased that justice might finally work its will."

Privately, Republicans in both the Senate and the House said that President Nixon was particularly damaged by count eight of the indictment, in which Haldeman is accused of perjury for which former chief aide H. R. (Bob) quoting the President as saying "it would be wrong" to pay hush money to Watergate defendants.

Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania was asked whether he recalled seeing the "it would be wrong" phrase when he read a partial transcript of the March 21, 1972, White House meeting where President Nixon allegedly made it. Scott refused to discuss the matter or to comment on the precise text of the indictments.

On Jan. 20, after a partial transcript was shown to him by White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr.,

Scott said he had seen "information" that would show the President was innocent of some of the Watergate charges.

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), vice chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, called the indictments "an important next step." It was Baker's questioning of Haldeman that led to one of the perjury accusations concerning Mr. Nixon's alleged statement about the hush money.

"It would appear from the fact of the indictment that the tapes, which I have not heard, may dispute the Haldeman testimony," Baker said. "Therefore, I look forward to hearing those tapes when the trial is held."

Another Republican on the committee, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker of Connecticut, said he stood by his May 17 statement when he said that the significance of the Watergate story was "not in the acts of men breaking, entering and bugging the Watergate but in the acts of men who almost stole America."

Public reaction from House Judiciary Committee members was relatively muted but almost every member who commented agreed that the indictments would probably speed the impeachment process. Both Chairman Peter Rodino (D-N.J.) and Rep. Edward Hutchinson (R-Mich.), the ranking Republican, declined comment.

Rep. Jerome Waldie (D-Calif.), a Judiciary Committee member who has introduced a resolution to impeach the President, said:

"It is highly improbable that the President was not a part of the conspiracy regarding the Watergate cover-up. There is no question but that the indictment of those closest to the President brings impeachment that much closer."

Waldie said the President should be subpoenaed and compelled to testify.

Railsback said it would be "premature" to talk about subpoenaing the President but that he thought the indictments would speed the impeachment inquiry.

"This is going to help us because it will lower some barriers," Railsback said. "I would guess that the court and Jaworski would now be more willing to cooperate."

Wiggins said that it is important for the committee to proceed even if the subsequent public report on the im-

peachment inquiry resulted in the dismissal of some indictments against the seven defendants.

"I don't think we can say to the country that we're going to sit tight," Wiggins said. "If the hard choice has to be made, even at the expense of guilty men going free, I think we've got to make it. There is the greatest public interest to be served in a resolution of the serious allegations involving the President."

Some Republicans discounted the immediate political impact of the indictments on the grounds, suggested by the Michigan poll, that GOP candidates were already damaged as much as they could be by Watergate issues.

But there was a refrain of disappointment in the statements of some staunch Republicans, even as they pledged to stand by the President.

Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona said in Ottawa, Ill., that he was "not pleased" with everything that Mr. Nixon has done "but he's my President and when I think of the alternatives, I'll stick with him."

Retiring Sen. George Aiken (R-Vt.), dean of the Senate, said, "The President's mistake was in not condemning these actions when we all heard about them."

A number of congressmen viewed the indictments as an impressive testimony to the strength of the American system.

"In a governmental and moral sense," said Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.), "the indictments . . . reflect once again that the appropriate and ordinary processes of our criminal justice system are working, and that they are working without discrimination or favor with regard to the high positions of influence and power formerly occupied by some of those who have been indicted."

Virginia Gov. Mills E. Godwin said the Watergate indictments are a "sad commentary" on the state of government. He called Watergate "a very ugly and sordid chapter in American history," but said he hoped that "out of the carnage of broken promises and great array of mistrust" that Watergate has generated, better government would emerge.

Contributing to this story were Washington Post reporters Spencer Rich, Richard L. Lyons and Mary Russell.