



Bill of Impeachment 'A Reasonable Bet'

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SOMETIMES changes in political situations resemble the changes that time slowly wreaks upon the human face and figure. In other words, such changes can occur so gradually that you hardly perceive them. But if you go away for a while, you are shocked by what you find when you come back.

Certainly it is fairly shocking to see what seems to have happened to President Nixon's situation during the past fortnight. In a nutshell, the betting two weeks ago was still against the House of Representatives voting a bill of impeachment. But today, it is a reasonable bet that a bill of impeachment will be voted and sent to the Senate.

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THERE ARE all sorts of signs of this. For instance, a big sign, thus far hidden, is the fact that one of the chosen leaders of the House Republicans, Representative John Anderson of Illinois, is letting friends know he is about to transmit the gravest possible warning to the White House.

The warning will be that the President must instruct his lawyer, James D. St. Clair, to cease withholding much of the material that the House Judiciary Committee has asked for. Otherwise, Anderson will predict, many Republicans may feel entitled to vote for a bill of impeachment, on the simple ground that the Judiciary Committee has been improperly obstructed.

The basic nature of the President's trouble is simple enough. Support for him that formerly seemed reliable has begun to get uncomfortably shaky. Consider, for

instance, the moderate-to-liberal Republicans for whom Anderson mainly speaks.

Among Republicans of this stripe, there was never any strong personal attachment to Richard Nixon. Until quite recently, however, these Republicans felt themselves somewhat regrettably yet inescapably attached to the President in quite another way. They greatly feared the vengeance of the Nixon loyalists in their constituencies, in fact; and they were therefore planning a straight party-line vote on impeachment.

Still deeper fears have now been aroused, however, by the recent series of special elections to traditionally Republican House seats. As everyone has already remarked, the outcome of these special elections prophesied a general Republican massacre next November. Hence the moderate-to-liberal Republicans do not worry so much, any more, about the vengeance of Nixon loyalists.

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FOR THE MOST practical political reasons, in short, matters like the tug-of-war between the House Judiciary Committee and the White House staff and lawyers are beginning to be examined in a new light.

No Republican voice has yet been raised in support of the White House. And Anderson's impending warning to the White House also reflects a widespread view among conservative Democrats who used to hate the whole idea of impeachment.

Such, then, are the reasons a House majority for a bill of impeachment has begun to be a reasonable bet.