

Memo to a Congressman: The Argument for Impeachment

Richard Reeves

There is no question but that your impressions of the public mood after visiting the district over the recess are valid. The conversations we had back home confirm the most recent Gallup and Harris polls: most people are convinced President Nixon is guilty of *something*, but believe impeachment could be bad for the country. I'm also aware of — and share — your concern about the stability of the system if we set a pattern of destroying Presidents. Even a society as diverse and essentially strong as the United States can take only so many shocks — the assassination of Kennedy, the savaging of Johnson, and now getting Nixon, either by resignation or an impeachment conviction. (Like you, I assume Nixon will resign when impeachment is inevitable — our only difference is that I already think it is inevitable.)

But you asked for the arguments for impeachment. Assuming you are convinced that the President has violated the law and his oath to the Constitution, these are the arguments you should consider: (1) Political — three more years of Nixon may well do so much violence to the Republican Party that the two-party system will be destroyed; (2) Governmental — you know the upper levels of the government are paralyzed; three-branch government cannot function when there are no well-considered "administration positions"; (3) Economic — the crisis of confidence is immobilizing much business; investors and consumers just aren't sure what's happening; (4) Moral — the country will be far worse off if we don't take action, we will pass into "anomie," the state of living without standards, a state that often leads to suicide.

I will consider the first three arguments briefly since they seem, to an extent, obvious. The fourth, the moral argument, is not so obvious, as the Gallup and Harris numbers indicate.

(1) Politics. Barry Goldwater has already made the news by predicting that Republican voting will be off by 10 per cent in this year's Congressional elections — and there are damn few 60 per cent Congressmen around here, which is one reason fifteen Republican incumbents have already announced their retirements. Goldwater's prophecy was based on polls by Dick

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Wirthlin, a good one. Another heavy, F. Clifton White, thinks things may be even worse for the G.O.P. — he managed the disastrous Republican gubernatorial campaign in New Jersey last year, and his numbers show that not only were there Republican cross-overs, but that the total vote fell off by 10 per cent and that the stay-at-homes were almost certainly disgusted suburban Republicans. "If nothing is done, there may be no Republican Party in 1976," he told me a bit apocalyptically. He also mentioned that his direct-mail fund appeals to registered Republicans lost money — the letters were coming back with scrawled messages like "Get it from Stans."

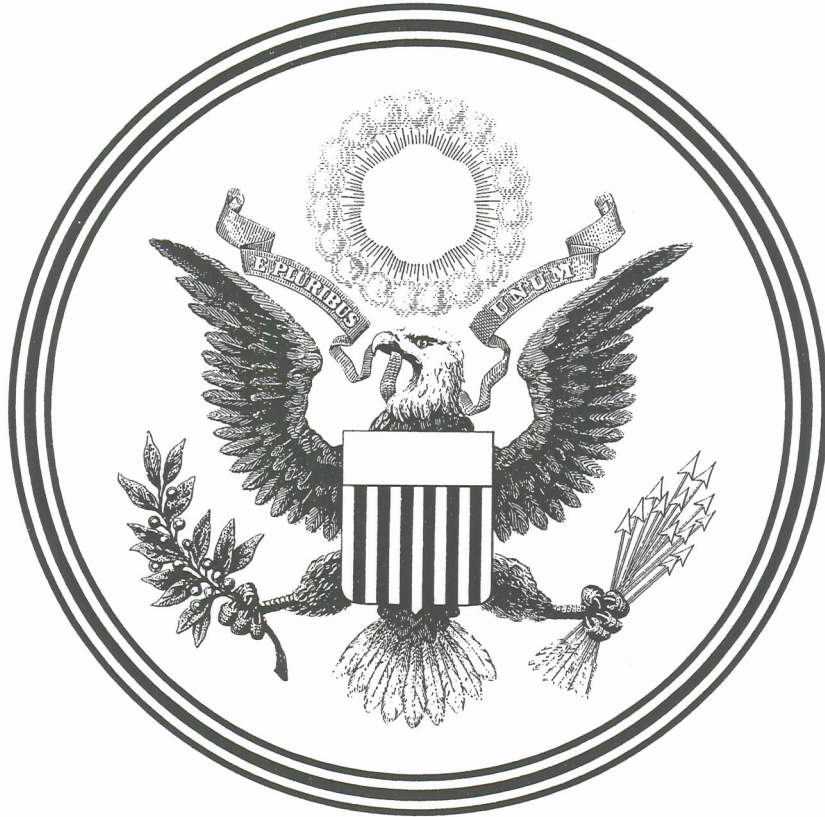
The fact is that Nixon has no

Richard Reeves is a political writer and Contributing Editor of New York Magazine, in which his article originally appeared (Feb. 11, 1974).

constituency left, only Republicans and conservatives who hate the thought of Democrats and lefties getting their own way after being clobbered in 1972. At last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, most of the private talk — profane private talk — was about how "the movement" could avoid going down with Nixon. I came away from that conference with this impression: the conservative Republican fallback position is that resignation is a victory for the lefties. And the Right is ready to fall back.

(2) Government. I would guess that the federal government is functioning at about 85 per cent — that is, the bottom 85 per cent, the bureaucracy, is doing what it always does. But the top of the executive branch is in chaos. There is no White House to resolve inner agency conflicts — H.E.W. and O.M.B., for instance, over implementation of new Social Security legislation — and, as you well know, there are no real Administration positions on domestic legislation, no matter how bravely the President postured in his State of the Union message. The thought of three more years is frightening. (Kissinger, of course, has become a portable government unto himself — but that's another story.)

(3) The Economy. The businessmen you talked with are scared and the implications of that are obvious — so is their caution and wait-and-see decision-making. This month's *Dun's Review* — which isn't exactly on a *New Republic* wavelength — reports that a majority of their "Presidents' Panel," 300 corporate heads, favor Nixon's resignation "for the good of the country."



The Great Seal of the United States

(4) Morality. This is the tough one — what is “right”? What is “good”? The argument I’m making here is that we cannot ignore evil without paying an incalculable price. If we do, we are all Herbert Porter. We are the sad young men who exposed their pathetic and amoral loyalty before the Watergate Committee last summer. We must act or we are indeed a society without standards.

I talked with Martin Marty, the Lutheran theologian-philosopher at the University of Chicago, who sees the current crisis in moral terms more dramatic than mine. He dismisses things like Agnew’s troubles, income taxes, and San Clemente as easy problems of “old immorality” — we force Agnew out and we’ll force Nixon to pay his taxes because we understand hands in the cookie jar. He is concerned with the Albert Speer-Adolph Eichmann syndrome: the existence of an inner government of amoral technicians following orders. This is some of what he said: “We need

enough faith in the country to invest in the country, but not so much that we idolize it. Right now we know that nothing is working — not the stock market, not the churches, not our international affairs — there is no systematic good happening.

We will be reacting to Watergate for years and years. Galbraith once said there were two events that had the most effect on our lives—the Civil War and the Depression. We now have two new sets of data to deal with in this country — the Vietnam war and Watergate. We haven’t come to terms with ourselves in Vietnam. We let it dribble out. If we continue to react to Watergate as we have so far, then we’re saying we can live under any kind of morality. We need an impeachment or resignation to be able to say that we have made up our minds on something.

“If we cannot see that we are all in this together and if we cannot bring about some kind of national air-clearing, then we are headed toward

anomie — existing without standards. Anomie only happens in affluent, technical, bored societies. We stop saying anything makes any difference. It leads to suicide...It happens to individuals in Sweden.”

I reminded him of the Kitty Genovese murder in New York — 38 people watching and doing nothing — and asked if he thought that was an example, seeing evil and not reacting.

“No,” he answered. “It’s *not seeing* evil. Not being able to see evil. Not being able to understand evil.”

There was a cartoon the other day in *The Dayton Daily News* by Mike Peters — Dayton, you remember, is where Scammon and Wattenberg’s 47-year-old machinist’s wife lives. The drawing showed a German *Brauhaus* with a calendar marked 1936 and a picture of Hitler on the wall. Two men were bent over steins of beer and one was saying: “No, I think impeachment would hurt the country too much....”

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