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# Signs of Erosion Appear in



**HOWARD PHILLIPS**      **REP. JOHN ASHBROOK**  
... favor impeachment of President Nixon

By Lou Cannon

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New signs of erosion in President Nixon's efforts to forestall impeachment appeared yesterday among the conservatives who up to now have constituted the bedrock of his support.

Howard Phillips, the President's former director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, announced the formation of a new group known as Conservatives for the Removal of the President, which has as its aim the building of impeachment support among conservative constituencies.

And Rep. John Ashbrook (R-Ohio) said that he was now prepared to vote for impeachment and that it would take "a miracle of evidence to change my mind."

Ashbrook, who opposed Mr. Nixon for the presidency in 1972, has previ-

ously called for his resignation. But up to now he has always opposed impeachment and described it as an alternative that was unpalatable for conservatives.

A number of other conservative GOP members in the House who until a few weeks ago has been considered certain anti-impeachment votes also emerged in the undecided column. These included Ben Blackburn of Georgia, Robert Baumann of Maryland, John Rousset of California and Lamar Baker of Tennessee.

Baumann said that conservatives in the House were split into three groups—one solidly for impeachment, another undecided and wanting to weigh the evidence, and a third group that is "totally blind." He put himself in the second category.

## Nixon's Conservative Support

Baumann said this middle group probably was leaning toward impeachment but that no decisions had been reached. He said the conservative members of the House would meet among themselves later in the week.

The announcement by Phillips that he will form Conservatives for the Removal of the President—which he calls "CREEP 2" because it has the same initials as the Committee for the Re-election of the President—is seen as likely to generate more support in favor of impeachment.

"Nixon will fall when conservative constituencies make it possible for conservative legislators to vote for his impeachment," Phillips said.

A mailing sent out by Phillips yesterday contends that Mr. Nixon was pursuing

a "survival strategy" in which all principled decisions on issues had been sacrificed.

"The President responds to the pressures of the moment, often without respect to source or merit," the letter said. "Thus on land use, conservative pressures were greatest and Nixon yielded to them. On legal services, he caved in to threats from the left."

Phillips said he would prefer that Mr. Nixon resign and believes that he might still do so. But if he doesn't, Phillips continued, he should be impeached.

"... I join those conservatives who believe that Mr. Nixon should be held to the same standards of conduct for which we have argued in the past and to which we wish to hold others in the future," the letter said.

Conservatives for Removal of the President is being financed by Richard Vigurie, whose Virginia-based firm specializes in direct

mail for Republican candidates. Vigurie, like Phillips, is a longtime Nixon supporter.

One of the key issues leading to Phillips' own decision to oppose the President was Mr. Nixon's signing of a bill creating a legal services corporation. Phillips said that the President had pledged to Blackburn and to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) that he would not sign such a bill.

Phillips said that conservatives were entitled to draw conclusions about the President's veracity on Watergate issues from such actions.

"If he will lie about issues of little concern to him, as he has lied, surely it is reasonable to conclude—as I have personally concluded—that he would likewise on matters relating to the question of his personal survival," Phillips said.

Within the House, the key question seemed to be the political issue of whether conservatives will

be perceived as the President's chief defenders and face retaliation from the voters because of it.

One GOP congressman who asked not to be quoted said he faced a "no win" situation on his impeachment vote, since a vote to impeach would enrage his loyal supporters and fundraisers within the party. On the other hand, he said, impeachment is becoming steadily more popular with the independent voters he needs to win elections.

Another GOP congressman suggested that it was now time for the President to accept a five-month-old idea advocated by Rep. Lou Frey (R-Fla.). Frey suggested that Mr. Nixon take Republican congressmen off the hook by asking for a house vote for impeachment in the interest of a speedy trial in the Senate and a final resolution of the issue.

This idea has been persistently rejected by the White House.