Impact of Nixon Resignation Leaves Area Politicians Split

By Karlyn Barker
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Maryland and Virginia political figures were divided yesterday over what impact the resignation of President Nixon and his replacement by Gerald Ford will have on elections for federal, state and county offices this fall.

Republican candidates tended to express the view that Mr. Nixon's departure from the White House will unshackle the party from the Watergate scandal during the campaign.

Democrats agreed that Watergate will not be the campaign issue it would have been had impeachment hearings dragged on, but a few said Democratic candidates were bound to gain now that Republicans are adjusting to new leadership.

"It's pretty hard for a GOP candidate to put up with the loss of his President and party leader," said State Sen. William S. James (D-Harford), who also is president of the Maryland Senate. "It will help the Democrats and hurt the Republicans."

Rep. Lawrence J. Hogan, the Republican congressman from Prince George's County whose bid to replace Democrat Marvin Mandel as governor got a boost when he became the first Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee to announce for impeachment, said he thinks that all Republicans will be helped by Nixon's departure because it removes the burden of Watergate.

"Being a Republican is a nonissue now," said a Hogan strategist. "Watergate is a nonissue now."

The Mandel camp indicated it plans to wait and see how a new Republican President moves on the economy. Up until now, the governor's basic campaign thrust has been to contrast his fiscal record in Maryland with the economic problems of the Nixon administration.

Aides to U.S. Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.) said they see the change in President as a plus for their candidate's re-election, in part because the senator will have more time to campaign and will not be tied up in an impeachment trial. Also they said they see Mr. Nixon's departure as confirming the correctness of Mathias' early and continued criticisms of the White House over Watergate.

Democrats are not ready to concede that having Mr. Ford as President necessarily will hurt them in the Senate race.

"For us, it really doesn't alter the style or logic of the campaign," said Walter Orlinsky, Baltimore City Council president and campaign manager for Barbara Mikulski, one of 11 Democratic Senate candidates.

"Some of Mathias' support came because of his stand on Watergate. Now, it's not an issue any more, and he's just a Republican again," said Orlinsky, who added that Miss Mikulski will continue to attack Mathias on economic issues.

Rival candidates for Congress from Virginia and Maryland had varying opinions about how their campaigns would be helped or hurt by Mr. Nixon's resignation.

In Virginia's 10th Congressional District, incumbent Republican Joel Broyhill and Democratic challenger Joseph L. Fisher were in rare agreement: both thought Nixon's departure would not significantly affect their campaign.

"My campaign has not been based or predicated on the Watergate scandal or impeachment," said Fisher. "I talk more about inflation and the environment . . . but I think Watergate will still help new candidates with open, frank approaches, candidates who are beholden to no group."

Broyhill, calling attention to his 22-year record in public office, said he "never thought Watergate would have too much effect to begin with . . . I couldn't conceive that something over which I had no control would have a significant effect."

Both candidates for Congress in Virginia's Eighth District, incumbent Republican Rep. Stanford E. Parris and Democratic challenger and Fairfax County Supervisor Herbert E. Harris, said yesterday that having Mr. Ford as President will strengthen the chances of tions this fall.

Harris said Mr. Ford "is not such a controversial person" as Mr. Nixon. "That makes Republican candidates' lots somewhat easier because they'll be able not to have to defend the Nixon policies as vigorously as they have in the past."

Parris, in whose district Mr. Ford has maintained a Washington area home for more than 20 years, said he hopes to have the new President campaign on his behalf as he had promised prior to becoming President.

In Maryland's Eighth Congressional District the four Democratic candidates — Lanny Davis, Sidney Kramer, Robin Ficker and Robert Howard — viewed the former President's resignation as having little impact on either the primary or the general election.

But Sheldon Z. Kaplan, a Washington attorney opposing Republican incumbent Gilbert Gude in the Republican primary, said he considered Mr. Nixon's resignation a boost to his own chances to defeat Gude.

"I feel my chances of unseating him are better than they were before," said Kaplan.

In the race for U.S. Congress from Maryland's Fourth District, Republican incumbent Rep. Marjorie S. Holt continued to maintain that Watergate and its aftermath would not detract from her two-year record in office. "Watergate has been a big question in the minds of people, but I don't think they've judged me on that," she said.

Her Democratic opponent, Maryland Secretary of State Fred Wineland, said Mr. Nixon's departure would not change the campaign a great deal "because the dilemma this nation is in today isn't going to go away in three, six or nine months. . . . We're not talking about Watergate — we're talking about the nation's economy."

In Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, candidates for council and county executive agreed that Mr. Nixon's resignation will not greatly alter the local campaign.

Contributing to this story were Washington Post Staff Writers Martha M. Hamilton, Harold J. Logan, Judy Nicol, Joanne Omang, Gail Robinson, Edward Walsh and Douglas Watson.