

Congress Returns to Find Watergate Still a Burden

SEP 12 1974

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 11—The Congress that went wearily away last month heaving sighs of relief returned in force today to find that Watergate had not gone away.

As the House of Representatives joined the Senate in formal resumption of the 93d Congress—with a 200-year-old opening prayer for “order, harmony and peace”—Capitol Hill felt a sense of déjà vu. There were piles of wrathful mail, prompting professions of mournful regret, and the name of Richard M. Nixon, gone 33 days from the White House, still dominated the debate and deliberations.

This time the issue was President Ford's grant of an unconditional pardon to his predecessor and his consideration, apparently short-lived, of possible pardons for all those involved in Watergate crimes.

The powerlessness of Congress to reverse the pardon decision, as well as the antipathy of many members of it, was expressed most forcefully by a Senate Appropriations subcommittee, whose members made clear that they would not approve the full \$850,000 sought by President Ford to pay Mr. Nixon's pension and expenses through next June.

Throughout Congress, however, there was a tone of hostility and regret over Mr. Ford's decision to grant the pardon.

“To come back to this!” exploded Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., Democrat of New

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Jersey, as he stood just off the House floor in a circle of reporters, much as he had for months of the long impeachment inquiry. Mr. Rodino, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, rubbed a cheek tanned lightly at the New Jersey seashore, said there were hundreds of letters and telegrams in his office expressing “real outrage” and professed himself powerless to do more than object to the pardon of Mr. Nixon.

Representative John F. Seiberling of Ohio, another Judiciary Committee Democrat, happened on the scene and

said, ruefully, “I thought we were finished with this.”

An onlooker noted that Mr. Seiberling carried a looseleaf notebook on which a label described the contents as “draft articles” of impeachment. An old notebook bearing a new subject—energy legislation—the Congressman explained, peeling off the label.

The third-ranking House Republican, Representative John B. Anderson, of Illinois, stalked hurriedly by the group in the House Speaker's Lobby and, ascending the Capitol in an elevator, proclaimed disgust at the lingering political hangover of the Nixon Presidency.

“Why,” he said, “were we ever stupid enough to think this awful man would fade away like one of MacArthur's old soldiers? He was always going to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into oblivion.”

Members of the Senate, who came back from the Labor Day recess last week, have been taking to the chamber's floor or trudging to the Senate television gallery with regularity to denounce the Nixon pardon. At one point yesterday, there was a line in the gallery, Senators Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, and Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, waiting for Senator Edward W. Brooke, Republican of Massachusetts, to finish his stint of responding to television correspondents' questions.

Mr. Weicker scribbled on a handy piece of paper and held up to a large window of the soundproof booth his own question for Senator Brooke: “Tennis?”

Today as the larger and customarily more clamorous House returned to active duty, the preoccupation with the Nixon pardon was equally evident. The House chaplain, the Rev. Edward Gardiner Latch, began the session with a recitation of the same prayer read to the First Continental Congress, on Sept. 7, 1774, by the Rev. Jacob Duche.

“Be thou present, O God of wisdom” the prayer asked in part, “and direct the councils of this honorable assembly, enable them to settle on the best and surest foundation, that the scene of blood may be speedily closed; that order, harmony and peace may be effectually restored, and truth and justice, religion and piety prevail and flourish among the people.”

No sooner had the chaplain completed what House Speaker Carl Albert called “the longest prayer” than eight House

members rose to take advantage of one-minute parliamentary grants of time for general debate, six of them to decry and two to defend the Nixon pardon.

Bulky Mail Pours In

Representative Edward I. Koch, Democrat of Manhattan, said that his constituent mail was comparable in bulk to the outpouring last October from “the Saturday night massacre,” Mr. Nixon's dismissal of the first Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox. He urged colleagues to “express their outrage.”

One of those who did, Representative Ken Hechler, Democrat of West Virginia, delivered a parody of a soliloquy from Shakespeare's “Merchant of Venice,” declaiming:

“The quality of mercy is getting very strained. It droppeth like nuggets of hail from the White House upon the heads of the just and unjust. It is twice messed up. It messeth up those that give and those that take.”

One of those who defended Mr. Ford was Representative William E. Minshall, Republican of Ohio. He contended that the pardon of the former President had been “consistent with the noble character” of Mr. Ford, the former House Republican leader, and that the current opposition to the pardon was no more than a numb reaction to any Watergate development.

“Emotions have run high too long. Nerves are too raw,” said Mr. Minshall.

Normality Returns

As if that were a cue, the debate ended abruptly and a semblance of normality in the House followed, with Representative John Buchanan, Republican of Alabama, rising to note with glee that the Birmingham Americans of the World Football League had amassed a 10-0 record by having done such things as “put out the Chicago

Fire,” “set the California Sun” and “flattened the Detroit Wheel.”

Congressional leaders had voiced opposition, amid the brief placidity of President Ford's self-proclaimed “honeymoon” with Congress, that the remainder of the 93d session could be devoted to long-side-track issues.

At a news conference this morning, Senators Lloyd M. Bentsen of Texas and Bill Brock of Tennessee, chairmen, respectively, of the 1974 Senate Democratic and Republican Campaign Committees, announced that they would debate one another in Chicago, Atlanta, Boston and Los Angeles on the central issues, under the auspices of the American Enter-

prise Institute for Public Policy Research.

The announcement of the high-level debates turned into something of a debate, however, on the extent to which the Nixon pardon would affect the 1974 campaign. Mr. Bentsen inserted the matter, as an afterthought, in the list of pertinent issues to be discussed and said it would surely work “to the detriment of the Republicans.”

Mr. Brock retorted that, while he would concede that the subject was a valid issue, it would fade before November in the face of more serious matters.

“If the President is going to be an issue in the fall,” he said, “I would a whole lot rather be a Republican than a Democrat.”

Yet when Mr. Bentsen declared his confidence “that our candidates are going to have the word ‘Democrat’ on their billboards,” and implied that Republicans might be less proud of the party label, Mr. Brock declined an invitation to reply.

Nixon Aid Debates

“It depends how things turn out,” he said.

The uncertainty about the lasting impact on Congressional candidates of the Watergate morass was mirrored in much of the activity today on Capitol Hill.

The Senate Appropriations Committee panel held day-long deliberations about whether and how to pare the White House budget request for \$850,000 to help Mr. Nixon through the transition to private citizen.

Senator Weicker, joined by Representative Jerry Litton, Democrat of Missouri, held a news conference to announce the introduction of a reform bill intended to severely restrict access by the White House and others to confidential files of the Internal Revenue Service.

Senators Alan Cranston, Democrat of California, and Brooke introduced a “sense of the Senate” resolution containing 11 “whereas” clauses and the stipulation that no further Watergate pardons should be granted “until after the judicial process had been fully completed (including the exhaustions of all rights of appeal).”

In the most urgent remnant of the Watergate era, committees in both the Senate and House held closed strategy sessions to try to determine how soon they might conduct formal hearings on President Ford's nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller to be Vice President. Mr. Rodino held out little hope that his Judiciary Committee would complete its examination before the Nov. 5 elections, thus underscoring the announcement by Congressional democratic leaders that a post-election session was probable.