

California: Campaigning on Watergate

One chance to bring Richard Nixon before the courts lies in California where William A. Norris, Democratic candidate for attorney general, has asked Republican incumbent Evelle Younger to call a special grand jury to look into the possibility that Nixon committed California crimes.

The Ellsberg break-in took place in California. If the former President ordered it or knew about it in advance, he may have committed a conspiracy to commit burglary and to obstruct California justice.

Then there is John Ehrlichman's forthcoming perjury trial in Los Angeles. Ehrlichman is charged with lying to a grand jury when he said he had no knowledge of the Ellsberg break-in. Did the former President order him to lie or have knowledge that he intended to lie? If so, he again may have been guilty of obstruction of justice.

Norris has also raised the question as to whether the former President had knowledge of illegal fund raising in California during the 1972 campaign and whether he gave the order to conduct an illegal wiretap on his brother Donald in California.

Norris has been fighting an uphill battle against the better known Younger, but President Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon has given Norris' campaign an enormous lift. To counter it, Younger may be forced to ask Los Angeles

"The Nixon pardon has brought Watergate right back into voter consciousness."

County District Attorney Joe Busch, who brought the case against Ehrlichman, to seek an indictment of Nixon. Busch is in Younger's corner and in excellent position to help. By seeking an indictment now, he can prevent Norris from following Younger around the state asking why it hasn't been done.

There are lessons here for Gerald Ford. First, the Nixon pardon has brought Watergate right back into voter consciousness. We may never know whether Gerald Ford intended to cover up, but the fact is that he did cover up and that candidates for statewide office like William Norris have a right to raise the issue to do what they can to correct the wrong.

Second, the California lesson proves that Gerald Ford is wrong in thinking that he can write "the end" to the Watergate affair. Even if Norris is successful in California, it will not mark "the end" because an indictment and trial in California would settle only a few of the questions about Nixon's conduct which his successor has tried to still. Unanswered questions will go on echoing down through history.

It was a terrible error—that pardon—for Gerald Ford, on whom so many had placed so much early hope, and for the Republican Party and for the United States.

And if Mr. Ford goes on to pardon Nixon employees now under indictment, he will only compound the error. The Norrises running for statewide office will find ways to seek at least a partial justice and the questions will go on echoing.

There have been violations of law in other states. A Florida grand jury indicted Donald Segretti. Mr. Nixon's associates in the course of their fund raising may have violated a number of state laws. Democratic candidates will have good reason for trying to prove it.

One of the ironies of the California lesson is that Edmond Brown Jr., the son of the man to whom Nixon lost the California gubernatorial race in 1962, will probably be the state's next governor. If Nixon is indicted in California, the former President will have to ask Brown for a pardon.