

G.O.P. Found Hurt by Cambodia Drive

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By R. W. APPLE Jr.
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WASHINGTON, May 10—President Nixon's decision to send American troops into Cambodia and the protests that followed have hurt the Republican party's standing with the voters, Republican and Democratic politicians agreed this weekend.

Political leaders in all parts of the country, interviewed by The New York Times, said that if this year's Congressional election were held tomorrow the Republicans would have little chance to gain control of the Senate, where they need seven more seats, and would certainly lose seats in the House of Representatives.

But many of the same people added that the President retained the initiative and warned that, if Mr. Nixon was able to show results from the Cambodian attack, he might be able to turn the entire episode into a net gain for his party by November.

"If the President gets the troops out of Cambodia," said a Democratic Senator who faces a difficult fight for reelection, "if he suffers relatively few casualties there, if he can show any evidence of military success—even if the evidence is bogus—we will have a tough time making a case against him."

Short-Term Gain

Former Gov. Philip Hoff of Vermont, a Democrat who is seeking the seat held by Senator Winston L. Prouty, said he had been helped in the short term but would be hurt if there were further student violence, such as that at Kent State University in Ohio last Monday.

At the White House, the two men most concerned with political matters, Murray Chotiner and Harry Dent, have told apprehensive state Republican leaders to let time heal the wounds of the last two weeks, not to panic, and that everything would be all right long before the fall.

President Nixon will undoubtedly make the same point to some of the Republican Governors tomorrow. All 50 Governors have been invited to confer with him at the White House at 1:30 P.M.

The exact dimensions of the public response are not yet clear. A Gallup Poll, taken immediately after the President's speech on April 30, in which he announced his decision to send United States troops into Cambodia, showed that only 51 per cent of the public approved of the Cambodian action and that 58 per cent were opposed to sending American troops into Cambodia.

Rallying Instinct

Louis Harris began a national survey this weekend, hoping to catch reaction not only to Cambodia but also to the deaths of four students at Kent State, the President's news conference last Friday night and the largely peaceful antiwar demonstrations in Washington yesterday.

"The instinct of most people is to rally around the President," Mr. Harris said in an interview. "The question of whether people really approve of a policy or not must be measured later."

Mr. Harris' reading of the na-

tional mood will be available in about 10 days.

The Cambodian invasion is only one of the things that will sway voters when they go into the booths on Nov. 3. The state of the economy, local taxes, the personalities of the candidates and other issues yet unknown will also have an impact. But all the politicians questioned agreed that Southeast Asia, after a lapse of six months, had resumed its place as the primary factor in the political dialogue.

Democratic Criticism

Evidence that that conclusion is shared by leaders of the Democratic party was supplied by the tough anti-Nixon statement issued last week by the Democratic Policy Council and by the outspoken speech of Lawrence F. O'Brien, the Democratic national chairman, at a dinner in Milwaukee on Friday.

Ira Kapenstein, Mr. O'Brien's deputy, said that the Administration was presenting a public image of discord and incompetence that would help the Democrats. But he argued that the Republicans were effectively taking their case to the electorate through appearances on television by Mr. Nixon; his communications director, Herbert G. Klein, on the Dick Cavett show, and Vice President Agnew on the David Frost program.

"The public is confused," Mr. Kapenstein added. "If we don't present our viewpoint forcefully enough, we might not make any real headway."

Wary of Campus Violence

Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, chairman of the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee, expressed apprehension about student response to the Cambodian campaign. Trouble on the campuses and on the streets, he said, "could turn this into a political two-edged sword very quickly."

Mr. Inouye argued, however, resentment over the President's decision could tip the balance in such races as those of Mr. Hoff in Vermont; Senator Frank E. Moss, Democrat of Utah, who faces a strong challenger in Representative Laurence J. Burton, and Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee, who is fighting for political survival against Representative William E. Brock 3d.

Mr. Gore's advisers agree with Senator Inouye's conclusion that the Senator will now be able to say, with more force than before, "I told you so." He has been an aggressive and consistent opponent of the war.

With 'a Bit of Luck'

Senator John G. Tower of Texas, Mr. Inouye's Republican counterpart, said he was "well aware that the President's action is a net political liability in some parts of the country at the moment, but with any kind of success in Cambodia and a bit of luck, we should be able to change that."

In Mr. Tower's own state, Cambodia will probably make little difference. Senator Ralph W. Yarborough, a Democrat and long-time dove, was defeated in the primary earlier this month, leaving two hawks—Lloyd M. Bentsen Jr., a Democrat, and Representative George Buhs, a Republican—to clash for the seat.

Nor is there likely to be

much impact in Virginia, where Senator Harry F. Byrd Jr. is running as an independent against relatively unknown Republican and Democratic opponents.

In Illinois, Adlai E. Stevenson 3d, already ahead of Senator Ralph T. Smith in the polls, will almost certainly be helped. Authoritative sources report that Governor Richard B. Ogilvie, while publicly supporting his fellow Republican, Mr. Nixon, is privately infuriated by the Cambodian action and what he considers its prohibitive political cost.

Other states where dovish Senate candidates may benefit are California, New Mexico, North Dakota, Alaska and New Jersey.

Help for Metzenbaum

Howard M. Metzenbaum, the Democratic Senatorial nominee in Ohio, said that Cambodia "has to help me, because I'm an anti-Nixon kind of candidate, and with the stock market, Kent State and especially Cambodia, the people in this state are thinking anti-Nixon."

One of the chief strategists for Representative Robert A. Taft Jr., Mr. Metzenbaum's Republican opponent, tended to agree.

"It has to be a very substantial minus for most Republican candidates," the strategist said. "Taft will be hurt. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised to see him part company with the President if there is no evidence pretty promptly that this operation is going to shoren the war."

In Alabama, where the gubernatorial run-off is less than a month away, the events of the last week appear to most observers to have helped each of the two candidates, former Gov. George C. Wallace and Gov. Albert P. Brewer, in different ways.

"Cambodia has helped Brewer," said Robert Vance, the Democratic state chairman, because George has to attack Nixon to make his case, and people here don't like to see the President attacked in times of emergency." But Mr. Vance added:

"The demonstrations in Kent State helped Wallace, because people here don't like unrest. It scares them, and when they're scared they look to George."

Conservative Comment

Generally, however, those interviewed echoed the sentiments of a leading Republican conservative, known for his accurate assessment of voting trends, who said:

"This Administration said that it was going to take command, but we get the picture that it is not in control of things. The focal point is Cambodia and Kent State, but the state of the economy lies behind that and is just as important, if not more so.

"If Nixon gets out, or if violence gets the upper hand, he may be able to solidify votes in favor of the Administration. Otherwise, I'm afraid that we are in for a very unpleasant year."

Or of a Republican national committeeman from the Middle West, who commented:

"I'm hiding. Either it blows over, or we've all had it."