



Jean-Pierre Lafont/Sygma

Some Perspective on Watergate

By John J. Rhodes

WASHINGTON—It began slowly and built into a crescendo which has consumed the attention of virtually everyone in Washington and millions of Americans around the country. At first, it was dismissed as a petty burglary, an isolated incident. Now, it is a raging controversy which has threatened to paralyze the normal machinery of Government.

I am referring to Watergate—the illegal entry last fall of seven individuals, among them employees of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee. This incident has blossomed into a full-scale scandal, complete with charges and countercharges. And as the President himself admitted, "The inevitable result of these charges has been to raise serious questions about the integrity of the White House itself."

If course, the only responsible position to take, regardless of party affiliation, is unequivocally to reject the attitude which led to the Watergate break-in. Over the past several weeks, many leading Republicans in the Congress and around the country have urged an immediate and full investigation of the facts. The 1972 Democratic Presidential candidate, Senator George McGovern, has publicly stated, "Republicans have been among the most effective voices calling for full disclosure of all the facts."

Watergate must be resolved without delay. Far too much time has been spent on this senseless crime at the

expense of the normal business of Government. That has been, in my judgment, the real tragedy of Watergate: It has distracted us from many of the important issues which face our country. We must get on with the vital work before us.

Watergate must be resolved, but it must also be placed in some sort of a realistic perspective. Watergate was, as the President has said, "a series of illegal acts and bad judgments by a number of individuals." This should not mean condemnation of the political system. "It was the system," the President said, "that has brought the facts to light and that will bring the guilty to justice." I, for one, believe this.

All those who had anything to do with Watergate—regardless of their position—must be fully prosecuted and, if found guilty, punished as required by law. Future generations must know that we cannot condone this type of senseless and reprehensible activity.

The process is now under way which will result in full disclosure if it is scrupulously followed. We must see to it that this process proceeds unhampered. But now we must move on to other matters—vital matters of great importance to our people and to the world, whose consideration cannot longer be postponed.

Politics is full of good and honest men and women. For every person in the Republican organization who had anything to do with Watergate, there were literally thousands who worked tirelessly and honestly to re-elect the President and elect Republican can-

didates. No one party holds a monopoly on integrity, no entire party should be penalized by the actions of one group of individuals. There has never been any allegation that the Republican National Committee or any of its functionaries were involved in any way in Watergate.

Similarly, there is no evidence at this point to directly implicate President Nixon in the series of Watergate wrongdoings. In lieu of evidence, it is unfair to condemn the President, or his entire Administration. As Senator William Proxmire recently asked on the floor of the Senate: "Does not the President have the same simple right that every other American has to be innocent until proven guilty?"

I am proud to be a Republican because I believe in the principles of the Republican party. One of these principles was handed down by Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican President. President Lincoln said over a hundred years ago: "Let the people know the facts and the country will be saved."

The facts of Watergate will be displayed to the people of America. And America, once again, will have been saved, by the good judgment of an informed people.

John J. Rhodes is a Congressman from Arizona and chairman of the Republican Policy Committee.