

Nixon and Watergate: A

By Haynes Johnson

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CONGRESS, AT THIS POINT in the Watergate affair, appears sharply divided along party lines both on the question of President Nixon's personal involvement in the scandal and on whether he should remain in office.

Of 218 members of Congress who responded to a special Washington Post survey, 56 per cent said they believe President Nixon participated in the Watergate cover-up and thus, by implication, that he has lied on this point. Forty-nine per cent said they believe Mr. Nixon knew of espionage-sabotage plans for his 1972 presidential campaign. And 28 per cent said they think the President knew in advance of plans for the Watergate break-in itself.

But the 41 per cent of the lawmakers who responded not only followed party lines but showed significant hesitation to act against the President.

Most Democrats responding, for example, said they believe Mr. Nixon was personally involved in the cover-up and knew of the 1972 espionage-sabotage plans carried out on his behalf. But they show great reluctance to consider impeachment. Republicans overwhelmingly said they didn't believe President Nixon was involved in the Watergate scandal and therefore were even more strongly opposed to impeachment.

On the Senate side alone, almost 100 per cent of the responding Democrats said they believe the President was aware of the 1972 espionage-sabotage plans, and all said they think he participated in the Watergate cover-up. But 56 per cent of these Democratic senators said they did not think impeachment proceedings should be brought against him.

Senate Republicans, meanwhile, expressed strong faith in the President. Of all Republican senators responding, 90 per cent said they didn't think Mr. Nixon knew of the sabotage-espionage plans, and 81 per cent said they didn't believe the President knew of the Watergate cover-up. When asked if they thought impeachment proceedings should be brought against the President, 62 per cent of the Senate Republicans answered "No."

In the House, similar party-line divisions were evident. Among House Democrats, nearly half of those responding said they believed the President knew in advance of plans for the Watergate break-in; 76 per cent thought he knew of the espionage-sabotage plans, and 88 per cent believed that he was personally involved in the cover-up.

Despite such strong views, 46 per cent of the House Democrats said they did not favor impeachment.

House Republicans, like their Senate party colleagues, lined up solidly behind the President. Of those responding to the survey, 95 per cent said they didn't believe Mr. Nixon knew of the break-in plans in advance, 81 per cent that he knew nothing about the espionage-sabotage campaign, and 71 per cent that he was unaware of the cover-up. When asked about impeachment, 81 per cent of those responding said they were opposed.

1973

Survey of

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Congress

Current of Bitterness

THE CONGRESSIONAL PORTRAIT that emerges from the survey shows strong emotions and doubts coupled with a general recognition that all the facts are not yet known and that the final Watergate chapter is far from written. A striking number of Senate and House members from both parties carefully qualified their answers to questions by saying that either their opinions could change as more evidence is made public, or that it is simply too early to begin to judge the question of presidential involvement.

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In addition, an undercurrent of bitterness ran through many of the comments. Some vented their bitterness by attacking the President, others by assailing his critics, notably those in the press and specifically this newspaper. "Many of your reporters are members of the lynch mob with only one objective in mind—destroy the President," a Republican congressman wrote. "With nothing direct you resort to inference, innuendo, hearsay and incestuous reporting [of] each other. And you want shield. Indeed!"

A Democratic congressman who said he was "not sure" whether the President should remain in office, whether he should resign, or whether impeachment proceedings should be brought, went on to explain his answer this way:

"Beyond any doubt I believe the President not only guilty of criminal acts, but guilty also of attempting to undermine the very structure of the American political system, and the Constitution, and I believe his motive was greed—for both power and money. Additionally, I doubt his mental stability. Despite this I am not sure if his removal at this time would be good for the country."

The Post survey, containing a questionnaire listing seven basic questions, was mailed to all

ceptance if you had it returned to an impartial and independent agency for tabulating the results. You are not entirely free from a credibility gap.

—Senate Republican

I'm terribly dispirited and depressed by Watergate. I think Nixon, as President, is a national disgrace. Watergate and related matters—and the essential corruptness of his *entire* inner circle of advisers—demonstrate to me a lack of fitness to be President. He has lost his moral authority—and his continuance in office can only degrade the whole self-government process. He apparently does not realize or is not sensitive to the fact that his personal example does more to destroy citizen faith in government and the legal process than any other thing. It's a national and spiritual humiliation to see Nixon cling grimly to the wreckage of his presidency.

The obvious reluctance of the Democrat leadership in the Congress to *insist* on an immediate and total cleanup reminds me of the unwillingness to face up to the Vietnam war for 10 years. The country is leaderless—and that is a terrible indictment of us all.

—House Democrat

For God's sake no. Some would destroy our country to get their name in the paper or be seen over TV.

—House Democrat

It would be devastating to the United States, at this time, to have a President impeached (or, to a lesser extent, to have proceedings start) . . . I don't condone what the President has done; I think it was both foolish and ruthless, assuming he is guilty of some of this, which has not yet been proven. Placed in proper perspective, though, many businessmen and other citizens do similar or just as evil things frequently.

—House Republican

I would think that any President, upon hearing of the Watergate break-in, would, immediately, call in all White House staff and demand all particulars.

—House Democrat

The issues before the Watergate Investigating Committee should be these:

- (a) Are any new laws required affecting the financing or conduct of political campaigns?
- (b) Is there a need for a revised and enforceable code of political conduct?

—House Republican

Resignation or impeachment bother me because we get Agnew, surrogate Nixon. *Both* should resign. A defect in our Constitution is that a new election can't be called by Congress so that people can decide if a new President should take over.

—House Democrat

He approved—for five days—plans of action which "suspended" the Fourth Amendment—more disturbing than "Watergate."

—Senate Democrat

The Senate Select Committee hearings are not of judicial stature. The Watergate affair will be heard in a court of law. Any judgments and decisions will be made in due process. The guilty should be determined and punished accordingly.

—House Republican

If he doesn't resign and *if* Dean's testimony is corroborated, he should be impeached.

—House Democrat

Any President is the President of all the country. To drag him down is to drag the country down. Whatever involvement may have existed in delay of development of publicly disclosed involvement of staff in either the break-in or the cover-up does not warrant impeachment. On balance the President's overall record of positive progress for the nation, particularly in foreign affairs, produces a net plus. Now, both the reconstituted White House staff and the media ought to try to help in the gradual restoration of public confidence in government itself lest the constitutional cement that holds us all to-

gether be torn asunder. This would immeasurably harm both Democrats and Republicans alike.

—House Republican

You definitely need an "undecided" column. The President's isolation makes his intent and therefore the remedy unclear at this point.

—House Republican

As of this moment I do not believe the implication of Richard Nixon is so clear as to make possible a two-thirds vote in the Senate on an impeachment trial. Absent this, the action of impeachment in the House, while possibly but not probably unsuccessful, would merely divide and alienate our people to no good end. It is possible that this could change with further proceedings in the Ervin Committee.

—House Democrat

He should have known about Watergate earlier.

—Senate Republican

I believe Mr. Nixon is overtly responsible for the tone, the mood, the basic strategy directions. That places a heavy burden of guilt on him; but I *hope* and believe it prob-

able he did not know in advance of the specific illegal acts by the CRP agents.

—House Republican

Your survey is premature, in view of the fact that the investigations and hearings still are underway. Conclusions cannot be drawn at this point.

—Senate Republican

So far, the uncertainties are sufficient to allow him to stay in office. Looking at the practicalities, I am unhappy about any evident alternative to his remaining in office.

—House Republican

Impeachment, *without an overwhelming public demand for it*, can't happen. If it did, our system of government might not survive the internal crisis that would ensue.

—Senate Democrat

What has been happening is frightening. A cloud is over our government. The press, particularly The Post, the Senate committee, the courts and the grand jury are to be commended for the efforts at exposure of the crimes committed and the cover-up. The Nixon administration has been tarnished in history. Impeachment "No." Strong censure "Yes."

—House Democrat

The Results:

The House

The Senate

This breakdown of The Washington Post's survey of Congress was compiled and tabulated by Bridget Gallagher, researcher on The Post's national news staff.

	Republicans 58 of 192 responding (30.2%)			Democrats 110 of 240 responding (45.8%)			Republicans 21 of 42 responding (50%)			Democrats 16 of 56 responding (28.6%)		
	Yes	No	No Answer	Yes	No	No Answer	Yes	No	No Answer	Yes	No	No Answer
1. Do you believe that President Nixon knew in advance of plans for the Watergate break-in?	3.4%	94.9%	1.7%	48.2%	40%	11.8%	4.8%	95.2%	0	37.5%	50%	12.5%
2. Do you believe President Nixon knew of espionage-sabotage plans to be used on his behalf during the 1972 campaign?	13.8%	81%	5.2%	76.4%	18.2%	5.4%	9.5%	90.5%	0	93.8%	6.2%	0
3. Do you believe that President Nixon was personally involved in the Watergate cover-up?	17.2%	70.7%	12.1%	88.2%	9.1%	2.8%	9.5%	81%	9.5%	100%	0	0
4. If you have answered yes to any of the foregoing questions, do you believe that President Nixon should remain in office?	43.1%	0	56.9%	28.2%	48.2%	23.7%	33.3%	9.5%	57.1%	56.3%	31.2%	12.5%
5. If you believe he should remain in office, do you believe he should be censured by the Congress?	5.2%	70.7%	24.1%	30%	18.2%	51.8%	9.5%	52.4%	38.1%	37.5%	25%	37.5%
6. If you believe the President should no longer remain in office, do you feel that he should resign?	6.9%	44.9%	48.2%	48.2%	19.1%	32.7%	9.5%	38.1%	52.4%	37.5%	18.7%	43.8%
7. Do you feel that impeachment proceedings should be brought against him?	1.7%	81%	17.2%	26.3%	46.4%	27.3%	4.8%	61.9%	33.3%	18.7%	56.3%	25%



Drawing by Maxwell Silverstein

members of Congress. In every case where possible, the questionnaires were sent to home addresses. The lawmakers were asked to answer the questions and, if they wished, to provide additional comments. They were asked not to sign their names, but merely to indicate their party and whether they were members of the House or Senate.

Questionnaires were mailed in the middle of John Dean's testimony before the Senate Select Committee investigating the Watergate scandal. The answers thus reflect congressional sentiment as of Dean's testimony but before the scheduled public appearances of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former presidential aides H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and Charles W. Colson later this month.

Of the 535 members of Congress, 218 responded to the survey. The party breakdown was: among Republicans, 50 per cent of the senators and 30 per cent of the House members; among Democrats, 29 per cent of the senators and 46 per cent of the House members. Thirteen of the responses were in the form of letters or incomplete questionnaires that couldn't be tabulated.

Some lawmakers thought the survey itself was an act of journalistic irresponsibility. Rep. Frank Horton, a New York Republican,

should stay in office. When asked that question, 43 per cent of House Republicans who responded said "Yes." But the remaining 57 per cent gave no answer. Many said it was too early to tell, and others presumably did not answer because the question was addressed only to those who believed the President was involved.

On the Senate side, a similar state of ambiguity was evident among Republicans. Fifty-seven per cent of the responding Republican senators gave no answer to that question, for the same reason.

Democratic opinion also showed some uncertainty about that crucial question. Almost a quarter of the responding House Democrats and 13 per cent of the senators gave no answer to the question.

The Post also attempted to gauge congressional attitudes toward alternative actions—whether Congress thinks the President should be censured because of Watergate, or whether he should resign. Here, again, party positions figured largely in the answers.

On the question of censure, 71 per cent of the responding House Republicans were opposed, but 24 per cent of the House Republicans gave no answer. Among Senate GOP members, 52 per cent opposed censure, but 38 per cent of them gave no answer. For the Democrats, 30 per cent in the House favored censure, with more than half giving no answer. And in the Senate, 37 per cent of the Democrats thought censure appropriate, while more than one-third had no answer.

The question of presidential resignation brought a different response. While 71 per

called the survey "a heinous overstepping of the bounds of responsible journalism." He suggested that publishing the findings would "serve no useful purpose whatsoever and in fact would severely damage and distort the difficult and painstaking process of sorting fact from opinion in this entire sordid chapter of American history."

Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, a South Carolina Democrat, also questioned the wisdom of the survey. "I am not prudish enough to believe that off-the-record views are not frequently given but on such a sensitive and critical issue as the President's guilt or non-guilt and whether or not he should be put out of office, it doesn't serve any good purpose to obtain an off-the-record poll of the Congress. What remaining stability of the system there is is further destroyed by such a survey. It gives substance to the impression that The Washington Post is out to get the President and is doing so by bugging the minds of members who haven't got guts enough to stand up and speak their minds."

But such views were in a distinct minority. Indeed, the personal comments offered by so many Republicans and Democrats in many ways provided greater insight into present congressional attitudes than all the statistical complications of the responses, as the accompanying samples of those remarks indicates.

A State of Ambiguity

ONE OF THE MOST INTRIGUING aspects of the survey results centers on whether Congress thinks President Nixon

cent of House Republicans had opposed censure, only 45 per cent were against Mr. Nixon resigning. And nearly half of the House Republicans gave no answer to that question. In the Senate, 52 per cent of responding Republicans had no answer, while nearly 10 per cent of the GOP senators said they thought Mr. Nixon should resign.

On the Democratic side, 37 per cent of the senators said he should resign, with nearly 44 per cent giving no answer. Almost half of all House Democrats responding said they believe the President should resign, while nearly one-third had no answer.

Grave Doubts

THE POST SURVEY, taken at this interim point in the unfolding Watergate episode, does not answer the critical question before the country—whether Congress is prepared to impeach President Nixon. Under the Constitution, once a member of the House has introduced an impeachment resolution the customary procedure is to hold a committee investigation. If the charges are supported by the investigation, and the committee reports to the floor an impeachment resolution, the House then votes on whether to send the case to the Senate. A majority House vote is required to do so. In the Senate, a two-thirds vote of the members present is required for conviction.

But The Post survey does show that the President's congressional standing has been damaged, that opinions are volatile, that grave doubts do exist, and that the crucial point in the Watergate affair has not yet been reached.

Many members of Congress included individual comments in their responses to the Washington Post survey on the Watergate affair. The following are samples of the wide range of views they expressed.

We must have faith, I do have. I pray he is not guilty. I know Dean personally and have no faith in him.

—House Republican

Either Nixon knew of the Watergate network of espionage, in which case he is guilty of criminal complications, and should be removed from office, or he was ignorant of what his top aides were doing, in which case he is incompetent to be President. McGovern was right when he said this is "the most corrupt administration in our history."

—Senate Democrat

Let he who stands without sin cast the first stone.

—House Democrat

It's too bad that with the tremendous issues facing this country on pollution, crime, inflation, overpopulation, energy crisis, etc. that the public has to stomach the Watergate day in and day out. It's too bad the press has not tackled the "real" issues of this country which are paramount to the destruction of the presidency and this nation as you are doing.

—House Republican

Do you want Agnew for six years??

—House Democrat

I am a Democrat who loves my country—and even though I dislike Nixon the man, I want the President of the United States to have the same rights for a fair hearing as The Washington Post demands for the individual accused of burglary, rape, heroin sales, etc.

—Unidentified

Nixon will resign by October! Conservative and regular GOPs will be demanding it by then!

—House Democrat

While I personally detest Richard Nixon as a man of no principle and no human decency, questions arise here going beyond my personal feelings. While as a Democrat I find little pain in his troubles, I find myself deeply troubled as to the results of present events on the well-being of my country. To hold impeachment proceedings at this time, with only the evidence at hand, on Sunday, July 1, 1973, would further divide the nation and render Nixon and the presidency incapable of carrying out constitutional functions.

—House Democrat

Please give an honest count.

—House Republican

I am also an American and my name is John E. Hunt. I do not believe in anonymity or "unidentified sources" which do not exist. In all my years in politics I have never seen a campaign as mean and indefensible as the effort headed by The Washington Post, The New York Times, etc. to crucify Richard Nixon. The stature of the man is more evident than ever, as I know of no other man in either party who could have withstood the vendetta against him. Rather than destroying this man, you have made him greater. The interesting thing about hatchet jobs is that when they're overdone, they sometimes backfire.

—House Republican

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I think the House should initiate a Select Committee of Inquiry whose findings could conceivably lead to impeachment proceedings.

—House Democrat

The main fact overlooked by all in connection with the Nixon regime is the total incompetency of President Nixon to provide the American people with an efficient administration. Nixon's biggest crime is incompetency.

—House Democrat

I think John Dean is a liar and an opportunist. I believe Ehrlichman and Haldeman deliberately conspired to withhold information from the President. I think the hearings should stay on television. The full story should come out.

—House Republican

In every campaign of Richard Nixon going back to 1946 he has used the same tactics of smear, character assassination, and deliberate subversion of his opponents' campaign. Why should he change in the biggest game of all when he can hide behind the power of the Presidency—and behind the awesomeness with which the press has vested the rather ordinary human being who holds the office? I cannot answer a questionnaire that wants yes or no answers—how simplistic (and susceptible to selling newspapers) is such a questionnaire? And what are editors and publishers guilty of?

—Unidentified

It would be catastrophic for this nation and the world if President Nixon resigns or is forced out of office.

—Senate Republican

Impeachment if it is shown he can no longer lead due to credibility gap plus violation of federal law due to cover-up.

—House Democrat

If and when that time comes, I hope (think it best) that he would resign, rather than be impeached.

—House Republican

My principal reason for feeling the President should resign is because of the complete lack of confidence the Watergate mess has caused in the integrity of our government in other countries of the world. This has contributed to devaluation of our currency, an unrealistic value placed on gold and many other international problems that can be resolved only by the resignation of the President.

—House Democrat

Your survey would have much more ac-