

Illinois Republican Finds Watergate and Prices Hurting G.O.P.

AUG 22 1973

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

Special to The New York Times

ROCKFORD, Ill., Aug. 18—Representative John B. Anderson, a Republican with a safe district and an independent mind, is the kind of man colleagues will look to for signals when Congress reconvenes next month.

His grim heading, after two weeks at home, is that his own hopes of running for the Senate 3d next year are damaged, if not dashed. He concludes that Republicans everywhere are going to bear the burden of President Nixon's embarrassment on Waterfront and the economy, and that there is no help in sight—least of all impeachment of the President.

A free-spirited chairman of the House Republican Conference, Mr. Anderson was publicly disappointed and privately "appalled" by Mr. Nixon's Watergate speech Wednesday night. Yet in the defensive, almost sullen mood of his district, the sharpest voices are still those of the Republican loyalists who helped re-elect Mr. Anderson and Mr. Nixon in matching and slides last year.

Over-all support for President Nixon in the district has slipped sharply — Mr. Anderson observed — though not to the 31 per cent ebb that the Gallup Poll reports nationally.

Yet the activists who write letters and make calls to Mr. Anderson's office are persistently critical of his detachment—of his open irreverence, for example, for the White House claim of "executive privilege," and of his vote to override the President's veto of the Congressional ban on bombing in Cambodia.

Boredom with Watergate is punctuated by bickering. When Mr. Anderson spent two hours at mid-day Friday as the guest star on WRRR's "Talk Back" radio show, most callers wanted to discuss anything but Watergate. Three callers touched on the White House scandal and all three were angry at Mr. Anderson. "You haven't stood up for the President or, for that matter, for the Republican party," one woman objected.

"I find myself resentful of the view that [President Nixon] typifies the party," Mr. Anderson commented later. "But he does."

"In view of the criticism I've exposed myself to for trying to hold the President's feet to the fire on Watergate, I don't find much disposition on the part of the people to worry about these abuses. I'd like to go back with a mandate to push for election reforms, but people seem preoccupied with bread-and-butter issues."

Concern Over Economy
Economic issues are no consolation to Republican in this conservative tool-making town, the heart of a sprawling farm district.

"The largest commercial baker in Rockford says that escalating prices of things like land, vegetable oil and flour literally threaten their survival, even if they raise prices," Mr. Anderson said in an interview here.

Tool manufacturers say it is becoming very difficult to get the special steel, castings and bearings they require. And at the Winnebago County Fair, farmers were telling Representative Anderson that when the freeze on beef prices melt Sept.

12, they would sell the cattle they had been fattening this summer. But the meat shortage will continue, they said, because at current prices of grain and feeder calves, they cannot afford to reinvest.

Until the Nixon Administration fell on adversity, Mr. Anderson had hoped, he said, to "throw down the gauntlet" against Senator Stevenson this summer. An evangelistic orator who entered the House as a conservative in 1960, he had felt broad encouragement from his Washington colleagues, including Senator Charles Percy of Illinois, to make the race.

The universal advice now, however—from House members, Rockford friends and his wife—is to wait for a better opportunity. He will make his decision in October, Mr. Anderson says now, party officials and independent observers expect he will run again for the House.

The disappearance of Donald Runnfeld, once expected to be the White House favorite to challenge Senator Stevenson, is another measure of the sudden Republican problem in Illinois.

"Whatever happened to Donald Runnfeld?" A Chicago columnist wrote recently of the former Congressman and director of the Nixon Administration poverty program. The answer is that Mr. Runnfeld is now the low-profile Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels.

Thomas E. Houser, the Illinois manager of the triumphant Nixon campaign last year, shares the dejected mood. He met and fuel shortages could jeopardize his own re-election.

He foresees a continuing decline of President Nixon's authority in Congress. "If Nixon

keeps stumbling on Watergate," he observed, "the Democrats could win some budgetary fights and maybe override some vetos."

Representative Samuel Young, who narrowly won a first-term from the Evanston area last year, with strong help from the Nixon sweep, was not reassured by the President's speech. "It showed the stress the President has been under," Mr. Young said. "It was not dramatic. It was not one of Nixon's better speeches. The months have taken a toll on him. Citing a Constitutional privilege against the Watergate investigators was not the thing to do. He's going to be subject to the criticism that he's covering up."

'A Lingering Cloud'
Representative Edward Derwinski, from the ethnic neighborhood in the southwestern corner of Cook County, estimated that President Nixon's support in the district was now "about 40 per cent" or 30 points off his winning margin over Senator George McGovern last November.

For Mr. Derwinski, as for Mr. Anderson, impeachment is unthinkable. "If I were Nixon or Gerry Ford," Mr. Derwinski remarked combatively, referring to the Republican leader in the House, "I'd try to get an immediate vote on an impeachment resolution and watch the Democrats run for cover. But Ford doesn't have enough imagination to do that, and the White House hasn't got the skill these days."

Yet White House scandal is a "lingering cloud," Mr. Derwinski said, and persistent meat and fuel shortages could jeopardize his own re-election.

He foresees a continuing decline of President Nixon's authority in Congress. "If Nixon

keeps stumbling on Watergate," he observed, "the Democrats could win some budgetary fights and maybe override some vetos."

Representative Samuel Young, who narrowly won a first-term from the Evanston area last year, with strong help from the Nixon sweep, was not reassured by the President's speech. "It showed the stress the President has been under," Mr. Young said. "It was not dramatic. It was not one of Nixon's better speeches. The months have taken a toll on him. Citing a Constitutional privilege against the Watergate investigators was not the thing to do. He's going to be subject to the criticism that he's covering up."

Conservatives for Nixon
The brighter news for Mr. Nixon here is that the conservative followers of Senator Barry Goldwater do not seem to share the Arizona Republican's stern moralism. Senator Goldwater remarked that the President's speech had done nothing to "divert suspicion." But here in Rockford, industrialists who supported Senator Goldwater's Presidential campaign in 1964 disagreed.

"He's being honest with the public when he says he didn't know about it," said Avey Gage, treasurer of the J. L. Clark Manufacturing Company. "I've worked in big organizations a long time and the big boss doesn't know anything the people around him don't want him to know."

Roger W. Erkert, vice-president of the National Lock Company, agreed. "It's unfortunate,

that a man of his ability was trapped by his subordinates, but that happens in a lot of businesses," Mr. Erkert said. Yet The Rockford Morning Star, a Republican newspaper, editorialized, "Sorry, Mr. President . . . people waiting for hard answers to hard questions were left empty-handed."

And even The Chicago Tribune, a powerful voice of Nixon Republicanism throughout the Midwest, was pointedly dissatisfied with the President's speech.

"The President finds himself in somewhat the same position as the draft-dodgers and other lawbreakers of prior years to whom he is unwilling—and properly so—to grant amnesty until they somehow redeem themselves," The Tribune said.

"Most people are not likely to grant amnesty to the White House until more of their questions are answered."



John B. Anderson
The New York Times