

Representatives Find Nixon Hurt but Call Impeachment Unlikely

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 28 — President Nixon is "not just a lame duck, he is a wounded duck," said Representative Howard W. Robison, a Republican with 15 years in the House. Among his upstate New York constituents more than four out of 12 who answered Robison's questionnaire favor Mr. Nixon's resignation or removal.

Yet, like most of two dozen House members recently interviewed in their districts, Mr. Robison will return to Congress next month believing that impeachment is an unthinkable response to the probably curable decline of President Nixon's leadership.

"As of now, I don't think he's committed any impeachable offense," Mr. Robison said. "Still, his capacity to lead and to govern has been impaired."

A certain numbness, rather than outrage, is a persistent theme of district soundings in the wake of the first Watergate hearings and months of sensational embarrassments to the Nixon White House. Some representatives conclude that the public crisis has passed. Others worry about voter reactions still to come. None has a public mandate for any action as bold as impeachment.

The opinion of the Representatives on the issue of impeachment is significant because in impeachment proceedings originate in the House of Representatives.

Representative Edward Mezvinski, a first-term Democrat from Iowa City, Iowa, senses a feeling on Mr. Nixon's part that "being President means never having to say you're sorry."

But President Nixon will survive, Mr. Mezvinski guesses despite Watergate, despite the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969 and 1970, despite the tax-paid improvements to Mr. Nixon's real estate and despite the economic woes that seem everywhere to stir more political feeling than all the questions of scandal.

"The people would like some acknowledgment that we can't avoid facing reality," Mr. Mezvinski said after the President, in a television speech, asked the nation to turn away from Watergate. "They also would like to have faith in the President because they do have faith in the country."

"But cynicism has set in," he said, and taken a hidden toll of the people and the President. "There is still respect for the Presidency as such. But people have lost faith in the President as an individual. They have lost confidence in what he says."

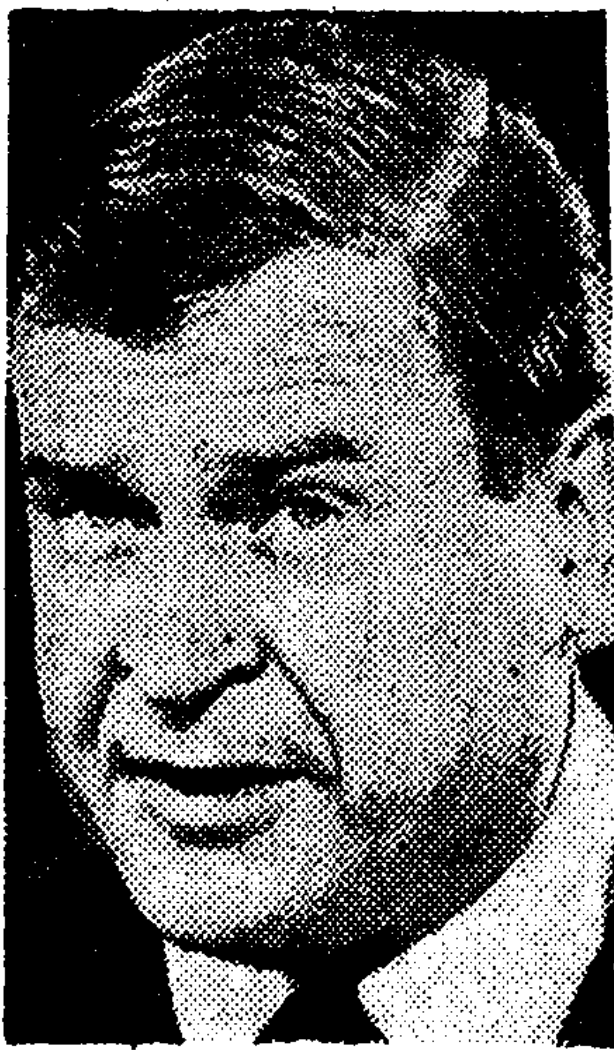
In two sharply contrasting districts in Cook County of Illinois, Representatives Dan Rostenkowski, an eight-term Democrat from the ethnic wards of northwest Chicago, and Samuel H. Young, a freshman Republican from suburban Glenview, report similar findings.

Gallup Poll Backed

Both men rate President Nixon's local popularity, after a Watergate drop, at around 40 per cent, not far from the Gallup Poll's national figures. Both men hear fewer Watergate complaints than before, and almost no impeachment talk.

Voters are torn, Mr. Rostenkowski felt, between disappointment in people—"politicians are bad," they tell him—and loyalty to basic institutions. "My district was always America first," he said, "very strong against Communism."

"They are an orderly people, a disciplined people. There is a great deal of respect for the



United Press International
Representative Dan Rostenkowski, Chicago Democrat, says his constituents are perplexed.

Presidency. If [the President] says the tapes shouldn't be made public," he added, speaking of the record of White House conversations that Mr. Nixon has denied to the Watergate investigators, "then they shouldn't be. And, you know, kind of feel that way myself."

Representative Hugh Carey, Democrat from a Brooklyn district that preferred Richard Nixon to George McGovern for President, last year, finds a broad disenchantment with the President at the mail overwhelming against him.

No 'Dump Nixon' Bid

"But curiously," he said, "when you talk this out with them, you find that they're not willing to get rid of Nixon, they're not willing to cross the bridge, they're willing to live with him, if he cleans up. There's no rabid dump Nixon movement yet."

Republican House members around the country rate the confidence in President Nixon "little changed" in Phoenix, "tarnished" in Canton, Ohio, "eroded" in Peoria, Ill., and "severely wounded" in western Massachusetts.

Democratic Representatives find Mr. Nixon's support "distinctly diminished" in Houston, down by "alarming proportions" in Sacramento, "deteriorated" in Tucson, and "as low as a President can get" in Cambridge, Mass.

However grave the analysis, Representatives view the damage to the President as something to live with and adapt to. For some it represents a still mysterious, deeply disquieting condition of American politics; for others it is a chance

casualty, its worst pain already over. It is not, in any case, the sort of problem that propels action.

"There has never been a day when I received a huge deluge of mail about Watergate," said Representative Robert H. Michel, Republican of Peoria. "Never anything like the day Truman fired MacArthur, or Taft-Hartley was up for repeal or there was a big farm bill up for a vote."

Diagnoses tend to reflect partisanship. The Watergate hearings were as absorbing as a soap opera, and as fleeting, Mr. Michel feels; at bottom, he suspects they were a form of entertainment. "People are quick to forget," he said. "Just because he's down now," he added of President Nixon, "doesn't mean he won't be riding high again in a few months."

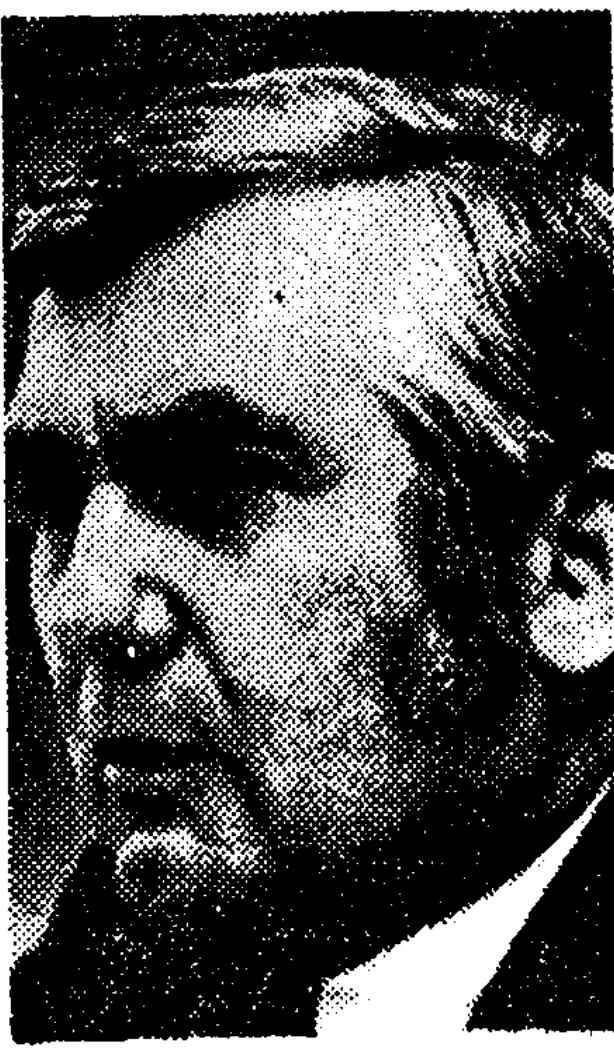
"Considered as an issue compared to inflation, Watergate is about as fundamental as 'Mission Impossible,'" said Representative Sylvio P. Conte of Pittsfield, Mass., another Republican who struck the "entertainment" theme.

Almost everyone agrees that high food prices, scarce meat, the fuel shortage, wage controls, high interest rates and other elements of a troubled economy are mentioned by voters more commonly than Watergate. Especially in Congressional politics, the economy—now and always—is the ranking "issue."

In northeast Philadelphia, all references to Watergate and to President Nixon under the "national problem" heading did not add up to complaints about inflation in the 10,000 response



Associated Press
Representative Robert H. Michel, Republican from Peoria, Ill., said he has had little mail on issue.



Associated Press
Representative Sylvio P. Conte of Pittsfield, Mass., a Republican, struck the "entertainment" theme.

to a questionnaire from Representative Joshua Eilberg, a Democrat.

Here and there, however, there are eloquent forebodings that Watergate haunts the public. People talk about price, said Representative Bob Eckhardt of Houston, a liberal Texas Democrat, but Watergate "is having a far more serious effect on people's attitudes."

"People just don't want to talk about Watergate," he said. "This doesn't mean they don't think about it. Maybe they think it's so serious that they don't want to talk about it because of the conclusion across the nation that the President isn't trustworthy."

Mr. Eckhardt continued: "People in the Southwest are innately loyal to their institutions and leadership. I get the feeling that this attitude is presently flawed and Nixon's popularity is distinctly diminished. I get this conclusion from a violent reaction against Nixon but from an embarrassed or quiet reaction. People aren't rushing to his rescue."

Representative Bill Frenz, Republican from the Minneapolis suburbs, makes a similar uneasy point. "People understand that Nixon is not going to resign," he said, "and they think that the likelihood of his impeachment is negligible, so we might as well go on with something else. [But] they're not buying Nixon's idea that it's unimportant or that they should forgive. They're just resigned to the fact that he isn't going to touch."

Congress, too, Mr. Frenz believes, will learn to live with

a certain amount of disbelief of President Nixon's repeated denials. "My personal view on impeachment," he said, "is that the chances are extremely light, unless they turn up 10 more witnesses who say, 'The little rascal in the White House planned the whole thing.' I think most people can live with the belief that the President may have been involved in the cover-up. They don't think that would be ground for impeachment."

Representative Richard H. Fulton, Democrat of Tennessee, campaigning during the recess in the rural counties near Nashville that were added to his district last year, finds the same puzzling reticence about Watergate. People prefer to talk about prices and community issues, but "if they are sick and tired of [Watergate] they certainly are keeping themselves well informed about it."

In most districts, Representatives are finding only small minorities in favor of impeachment. The 42 per cent figure in Representative Robison's questionnaire is relatively high, though probably not the highest. Representative Edward R. Roybal, a Democrat from East Los Angeles, estimates that President Nixon has the support of barely one voter in five and that "if it were not for the fear of who would follow," the sentiment for impeaching Mr. Nixon might approach a majority.

Most Anti-Nixon District

Representative Thomas P. O'Neill, the Democratic floor leader in the House from John F. Kennedy's old district in Boston and Cambridge, the most anti-Nixon district in the 1972 election, finds impeachment sentiment strong and growing. "I'm absolutely amazed at what the people are saying."

But the more striking impression is that individually and as a group, House members have notably less interest in impeachment than their constituents. "I don't think we will see impeachment proceedings," Mr. Roybal said. "I personally would not like to see the impeachment of the President."

Mr. O'Neill said, "the evidence would have to be overwhelming."

Representative Morris K. Udall of Tucson, a Democrat, feels that impeachment sentiment at home may have grown to 20 per cent. Yet impeachment remains "a very drastic remedy, an agonizing thing to put the country through."

He added, "I think the public

polls would have to be at least 65 to 70 per cent in favor of impeachment before that sentiment would be reflected" in Congress. "I personally feel that if anything happens to remove Richard Nixon from office it will come not through loud impeachment proceedings but through his resignation, pressured by party leadership, conservative newspapers and the financial world. The key is to watch the mainstream of national Republican leadership."

Among established House Republicans, however, there are no outward signs of panic or rebellion. Representative Hamilton Fish of Millbrook, N. Y., is still hearing from party workers, he said, "who profess concern about damage to the national party. They don't feel the party is guilty of anything, but they also know perfectly well it's hurt." Yet, "Any feeling for impeachment or resignation has peaked and is on the wane."

Representative Jerry L. Pettis, Republican from southern California, just back from mainland China, finds that despite unhappiness with President Nixon's "vague," inconclusive" accounting on Watergate, people in his huge, ranching district think it "foolish to talk of impeachment."

Impeachment, he said, is "the last resort." "You are taking a long step—forget about what happens to Richard Nixon—to telegraph to the whole world that you have reached the point where you are talking about overthrowing your Government," he said.

Representative Wiley Mayne, Republican from Sioux City, Iowa, believes that President Nixon still commands majority support in his district and he attributes the small decline on the "recent bombardment in the media."

It seems significant also that freshman Republicans, busily campaigning during the recess, do not feel compelled to disagree with President Nixon. Representative Ralph S. Regula, driving through the district around Canton, Ohio, in a mobile home, endorses the President's position that "Congress should leave Watergate to the courts."

Representative David C. Green, the first Republican Congressman from Louisiana since the Reconstruction, says that the Watergate evidence "now justifies the vilification the President has suffered." Even on the secret bombing of Cambodia, he argues openly, "deception shouldn't always be connected with evil."