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Taxes Top Watergate In ACU Poll

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A poll by the American Conservative Union shows that its members and other conservatives feel overwhelmingly that Watergate is not the most important issue facing the country but that taxes and deficit spending are.

The results do not surprise ACU Chairman M. Stanton Evans one bit.

"They're remarkably uniform," said Evans, who is also editor of The Indianapolis News, in a telephone interview yesterday. "It's a little appalling in the sense that they're predictable."

Then he was reminded of a sentence in his own covering letter that accompanied the poll:

"It is vital that we serve notice that Watergate is not the paramount issue before the country; that taxes, government expansion, and huge deficits are far more important to the American public," the letter said.

Evans admitted that "very possibly" the sentence could have slanted the poll.

"It's like speaking to yourself. You're going to get a mirror-image effect. It certainly is our feeling that those issues are more important than Watergate; so the feedback would tend to be responsive to what we (the ACU leaders) feel. On the other hand, conservatives are pretty individualistic. If they don't agree with us, they'll let us know."

Evans said the poll was mailed to 95,000 persons, including the 60,000 active ACU members, beginning last month. As of Aug. 15, 11,584 responses had been received.

Some of the poll questions:

• Is Watergate the most important issue facing America today? Five per cent said yes; 94 per cent, no, and 0.5 per cent were undecided.

• Will you be more or less likely to vote Republican in 1974? Thirty-six per cent, more; 12 per cent, less, 51 per cent, no change.

• Are you satisfied with conservative leadership in Congress during the Watergate period? Twenty-four per cent, yes; 54 per cent, no; 19 per cent, undecided.

• How would you judge media treatment of the President with relation to Watergate? Fourteen per cent, fair; 78 per cent, unfair; 8 per cent, undecided.

• Do you think the Senate acted properly in allowing TV coverage of the Watergate hearings? Twenty-one per cent, yes; 67 per cent, no; 9 per cent, undecided.

• What best describes your attitude toward Watergate? Twenty-one per cent checked "a scandal of major proportions;" 5 per cent said it was "the worst scandal in U.S. history" and 77 per cent said it reflected "the same shenanigans all political parties engage in." (Some checked two responses.)

• Which of the following three issues is most important to you? Watergate was checked by only 5 per cent; taxes by 29 per cent, and deficit spending by 79 per cent. (Again, there were double responses.)

Evans was surprised by only one set of answers—to the question about conservative leadership in Congress. "Obviously, our people aren't satisfied with our leaders either," he said.