

Public Unhappy With Nixon,

By Jules Witcover

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America, at the start of 1974, is unhappy with its President, but doesn't seem to know quite what to do about it.

In the world of congressional politics, it's fence-mending time, and as members of Congress tour their districts talking to their constituents and listening to them, that's what they're hearing.

Throughout the past week, a team of Washington Post reporters accompanied incumbents in 12 congressional districts, listening in on their conversations with voters and conducting

nearly 250 in-depth interviews with others.

Though neither exercise purports to be a scientific national sampling of American public opinion on President Nixon, together they convey a distinct impression that, as his sixth year in office begins, Mr. Nixon has a most precarious hold on the White House.

The voters are unhappy, and yet many do not appear to be anxious to have Congress take decisive action against him. Many would prefer to have him resign rather than have impeachment proceedings instituted against him, a step they consider radi-

cal and destructive of national stability.

Only slightly more than half of all those interviewed voters who went heavily for Mr. Nixon in 1972 want the President to stay in office and finish out his second term.

About one of four says he should resign and turn the presidency over to Vice President Ford. About one in five says he should be impeached by the House and face trial and possible removal by the Senate. And of those who say he should resign, about half say that if he refuses to do so, he should be impeached.

Uneasy on Impeachment

These responses, and others that congressmen are hearing themselves in their districts, are certain to have an impact on the major political issue facing the returning Congress—the House inquiry into impeachment of Mr. Nixon. Most of the 12 districts visited by the Post reporters, in 10 states in the East, Midwest, South and West, are marginal—that is, the incumbents won in 1972 by a narrow margin. Hence, what the voters have to say on this key issue should be a particularly critical ingredient in how their congressmen vote on it.

There are those voters, of course,

who still stand behind Mr. Nixon, and firmly, such as Alex Easton, a retired flood control engineer in San Fernando, Calif. He told Post reporter Leroy F. Aarons: "He's been a fine President, and we're happy to support him in every way we can . . . The news media has made everything sound so terrible, they make things bigger than they really are."

But more frequently, those who say the President should stay in the White House are likely to temper that opinion with severe reservations about his conduct or his judgment—a factor that

further underlines his precarious position as Congress prepares to return.

Dr. John Estes, a physician in Hollandale, Miss., told Post reporter Mary Russell: "I think you have to judge a man on the people surrounding him. Nixon has made a lot of mistakes in picking people. He's made many decisions that seem underhanded, but I guess they wouldn't be to other politicians. I don't believe he should be impeached. I can't see how that would help the country."

It is this concern for the country

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VOTERS, From A1

rather than any particular sympathy for Mr. Nixon himself, that marks much of the reluctance to see his resignation or impeachment.

"What comes to my mind," William F. Martin of Shelton, Conn., told the Post's Stephen Isaacs, "is the adverse effect of impeachment proceedings on the country. I'm not at all interested in Nixon's future but I am interested in America's future. America is at stake, not Nixon."

Also, a considerable amount of the sentiment for the President to stay in office appeared to stem from uncertainty and even fear over what impeachment might do to the stability of an already crisis-ridden nation.

Ben Luft, a retired embalmer in Pasadena, Calif., said: "Impeachment would be a slur on the country." And Rep. James G. O'Hara (D-Mich.), who carried his district with only 51 per cent of the vote in 1972, told Post reporter William Chapman this about the constituents with whom he has spoken over the holidays:

"With few exceptions, they don't want Nixon to continue. But they think of impeachment as sort of repealing the Constitution. No one can remember the impeachment of anyone, let alone a President.

"They feel it's a very extreme remedy. They think impeachment is an unthinkable action."

Mrs. Meredith Alfredo, who operates a voting-machine leasing company in Skokie, Ill., says she believes "all politicians are crooked, including the Senate [Watergate] committee," and that Mr. Nixon is "a fraud," but she's against impeachment. "That's not the American way," she says. "You're overthrowing the government, in a sense. It's just what the Europeans used to do. It's taking law and order into your own hands."

Mrs. Alfredo's view reflects a general misconception about the process of impeachment that appears to scare many voters away. Former Rep. Abner Mikva, a Democrat trying to regain his Cook County, Ill., seat, says:

"The largest group here is the people who just want the President to go away but are afraid of the word 'impeach.' These people have it fixed in their mind that if a man is elected President, it's for four years and to cut it short would be a real upheaval. They also have impeachment confused with criminal proceedings and this frightens them."

Though nearly half the voters interviewed say they would like to see Mr. Nixon leave the White House by one route or another, an overwhelming number—three out of every four—say they don't think it will happen. The President, they say, likely will stay in office and finish out his term.

One Mississippian said of Mr. Nixon: "He was a second-string football player but he stuck it out without quitting and he'll stick this out, too."

One factor that, ironically, might be aiding the President in his determination to stick it out is the energy crisis. Every single one of more than 30 congressmen interviewed by the Post, and nearly all voters interviewed said energy—particularly the gasoline and heating oil shortages—was the issue uppermost in their minds, not the fate of the President.

Post political reporter David S. Bro-

WXPost JAN 13 1974 244 Voters Seen In 24 Precincts

In preparing this article, reporters from The Washington Post conducted lengthy at-home interviews with 244 voters in 24 precincts, scattered across 12 congressional districts in 10 states. Political leaders of both parties in those districts were interviewed, and many others, from additional districts, were contacted by telephone.

The findings cannot be taken as a national sample, because the precincts chosen were typical only of the voting pattern in their own districts. Most of the districts chosen are politically marginal — the kind that can swing either way. Eight are now held by Republican House members and four by Democrats. Few strongholds of either party were included.

LeRoy F. Aarons interviewed in three California districts represented by freshman Republicans Carlos Moorhead and Clair Burgener and Democrat James C. Corman.

David S. Broder visited two marginal Republican districts whose incumbents are Walter E. Powell of Ohio and Robin Beard of Tennessee.

William Chapman was in two other marginal districts — those of Rep. James G. O'Hara, a Michigan Democrat, and Rep. Samuel H. Young, an Illinois Republican.

Stephen Isaacs was in the districts of Reps. Paul W. Cronin (R-Mass.), Ronald A. Sarasin (R-Conn.) and Edward J. Patten (D-N.J.).

Mary Russell visited two Southern districts, those of Rep. David Bowen (D-Miss.) and Rep. David C. Treen (R-La.).

The Washington Post wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Richard M. Scammon, director of the Elections Research Center in Washington and former director of the census.

Scammon helped identify the precincts with characteristics that met The Post's requirements for the voter survey. He is not in any way responsible for, or associated with, the findings of The Post reporters.

der, after interviewing in marginal districts in Ohio and Tennessee, reported an impression also widely found by his colleagues—"that the energy problems have so far not added to the demand for Mr. Nixon's dismissal, but served to soften that demand.

"The energy problem is another unexpected, inexplicable blow to public confidence in the stability of basic factors of life. The voters cannot understand where it came from or why it should suddenly be so severe.

"They are inclined to doubt that it can be as serious as it is portrayed, but they are not certain and, being uncertain, the last thing in the world they want to do is add a new factor of political uncertainty."

Also tempering the mood of the voters toward Mr. Nixon, the interviewers suggest, is a continuing and even growing disenchantment with all politics and politicians, nurtured by Water-

"I believe the others just never got caught before," Shirley Williams, operator of a cosmetics firm in Skokie, said. And H. L. Stoughton, a middle-aged pharmacist in a Detroit suburb who voted for Mr. Nixon in 1972, said, "There's always been this problem of corruption. All administrations have it. Nixon's just got out of hand." Asked what could be done about it, Stoughton replied: "I just don't know. I am convinced that a politician can't be an honest man."

It was clear from the voters' comments everywhere, however, that Watergate and related matters have severely eroded the high standing Mr. Nixon had at the time of his reelection 14 months ago.

"Even the President's defenders now see him primarily or even exclusively in the Watergate context," Broder reported. "The number who associate him with peace in Vietnam, success in foreign policy or any other dimension is tiny compared to those who immediately bring up Watergate scandals and related matters."

Just as there can be found avid defenders of the President, so are there those who have no qualms at all about impeachment and want it, the sooner the better.

"The whole country's lost confidence in Nixon," Woodrow Wesley Isaacs Jr., of Cleveland, Miss., said. "He's pulled the whole nation down. I know the people are fed up with Watergate. They want it settled and over with.

"But just because he's President doesn't mean Nixon's exempt from the law. If they prove a conspiracy between Nixon and his aides, Congress ought to do more than impeach him. He's President. It's his job to know what everybody is doing."

An airline pilot in Trumbull, Conn., said: "I'm a registered Republican, but he's the coach of the team, that's what it boils down to. You can blame all the players you want to, but when it comes to hiring and firing, you fire the coach."

Mrs. Theresa Citro, a telephone company employee in a northwest Chicago suburb, said of the President: "He acts like a king—he's always putting on airs like England's royal family. He thinks he's above everyone else . . . We've got to show him the public doesn't approve of him. We've got to show him the people don't think he's as great as he thinks he is."

Those who prefer resignation to impeachment often mentioned the ramifications on the country, not on the President.

Jacquelyn Praetorius, an employee of an installment loan bank in Kenner, La., said she wanted Mr. Nixon to resign because "impeachment would create a lot of chaos. Especially now with all the crises of the energy shortage and the economy, it would be a tragedy."

Along with Watergate, the President's handling of his income tax payments and other financial matters also is much in the voters' minds, with some defending him but most skeptical.

J.W. Wood of Cleveland, Miss., said of Mr. Nixon's tax writeoff in turning over his vice presidential papers to the government: "If I could find a box of paper I could palm off, I would have done the same thing."

But Harry Bruton, manager of a

farm supply store in Hollandale, Miss., said he thought the President had evaded the law in his income tax dealings and should resign or be impeached. "Considering what he paid and what I pay and keep paying," Bruton said, "what he did was a crime."

In addition to those congressmen accompanied by Post reporters in their districts, about 20 others who have been home over the holidays, both Democrats and Republicans, were interviewed by phone. The President has been hurt by the various revelations, they said, but they tended to split on partisan lines in reporting what their constituents wanted done about him.

The Republicans said they generally shared a reaction that Rep. James T. Broyhill (R-N.C.) reported from his constituents: "Why don't you fellows get off that and get onto something else, like the shortage of energy?"

The Democrats, by contrast, usually said they were getting the same reaction that Rep. Herman Badillo (D-N.Y.) reported. "There's a strong feeling that Congress is not moving fast enough," he said. "People are asking me, 'How come you're not doing more to get him out?'"

Either way, there appears to be a genuine desire to see the President's situation resolved, and soon. And the congressmen, generally a cautious, self-protective lot often are citing their roles as grand jurors in a House impeachment proceeding as reason for not saying how they would vote.

"My feeling is we shouldn't vote to represent our district (on impeachment)" Rep. William Moorhead (D-Pa.) said. "If impeachable offenses have happened, then do vote impeachment. If not, don't."

Rep. Ronald A. Sarasin (R-Conn.), a freshman who faces a primary challenge this year, demonstrated in a question-and-answer session before the Waterbury Kiwanis and Rotary clubs the ginger approach Republicans especially are adopting seeking to put some distance between themselves and Mr. Nixon.

"All the things we're doing are the right things to do," he told his audience. "We have voted a million dollars (for the House inquiry). There isn't anything else we can do. . . ."

"Whether in fact the President will be impeached or not I don't know, but it's incumbent on us in Congress to be careful in the manner in which we move. We don't want to bounce a President just because we're politically unhappy with a President.

"I have no hesitation in saying that if he's a crook, I'll impeach him. But I must tell you I don't think anybody is particularly enjoying the responsibility."

In sum, The Washington Post's talks with congressmen and their constituents suggest no clear-cut public consensus yet on what should happen to President Nixon. But they do constitute a clear warning that he is skating on thin ice.

A reluctance among voters and congressmen alike to resort to impeachment appears to remain a major factor in his favor, and that could be washed away by further revelations. The President's conduct in the weeks ahead, as Congress deliberates its course against the backdrop of concerned voices at home, therefore, can be critical in whether he falls through the thin ice of his greatest trial, or survives.