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**Now  
more than ever**

# The Negative President

By Richard J. Whalen

*The writer, a former Nixon adviser and speechwriter, is the author of "Catch the Falling Flag: A Republican's Challenge to His Party."*

SEVERAL WEEKS before the election, a very senior Republican whose words carry weight at the White House studied the polls showing an ever-widening Nixon lead and shook his head. In a tone combining irony and genuine apprehension, he announced: "We're in deep, deep trouble."

A Nixon loyalist, he welcomed the prospect of the President's landslide reelection, which materialized last Tuesday as massively as the polls had predicted. But he was worried about the effects of a spectacular presidential victory on the Grand Old Party, whose every flaw he intimately knew.

"This kind of stuff is political LSD," he said, tapping the poll results. "The President is sure to go off on an ego-trip."

Indeed, after the manner of Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, Richard M. Nixon is now playing and savoring the heady role of President of All the People. And given the often bitter nature of Richard Nixon's experience in politics, he is entitled to some self-satisfaction in his hour of climactic personal triumph.

Nevertheless, the election outcome does not prove the genius of the White House campaign strategists—led, of course, by Mr. Nixon himself—and Republicans outside the inner circle will be debating in the months ahead just where this famous victory leaves them and their party.

## The Negative Majority

THE DAZZLING pre-election visions of mandates, majorities and semi-permanent tenure in national power have been clouded, to say the least, by the Republican failure to gain expected ground in the Congress. As the beaming John Connally declared midway through the vote count: "Certainly no one can say this is a Republican victory."

Last spring, the President made the deliberate decision *not* to campaign for a Republican-controlled Congress, even though he did visit selected Senate battlegrounds. Applying to politics a familiar Republican economic doctrine, he was content to let presidential popularity "trickle down" to lesser GOP candidates.

Implicit in this strategy was Mr. Nixon's

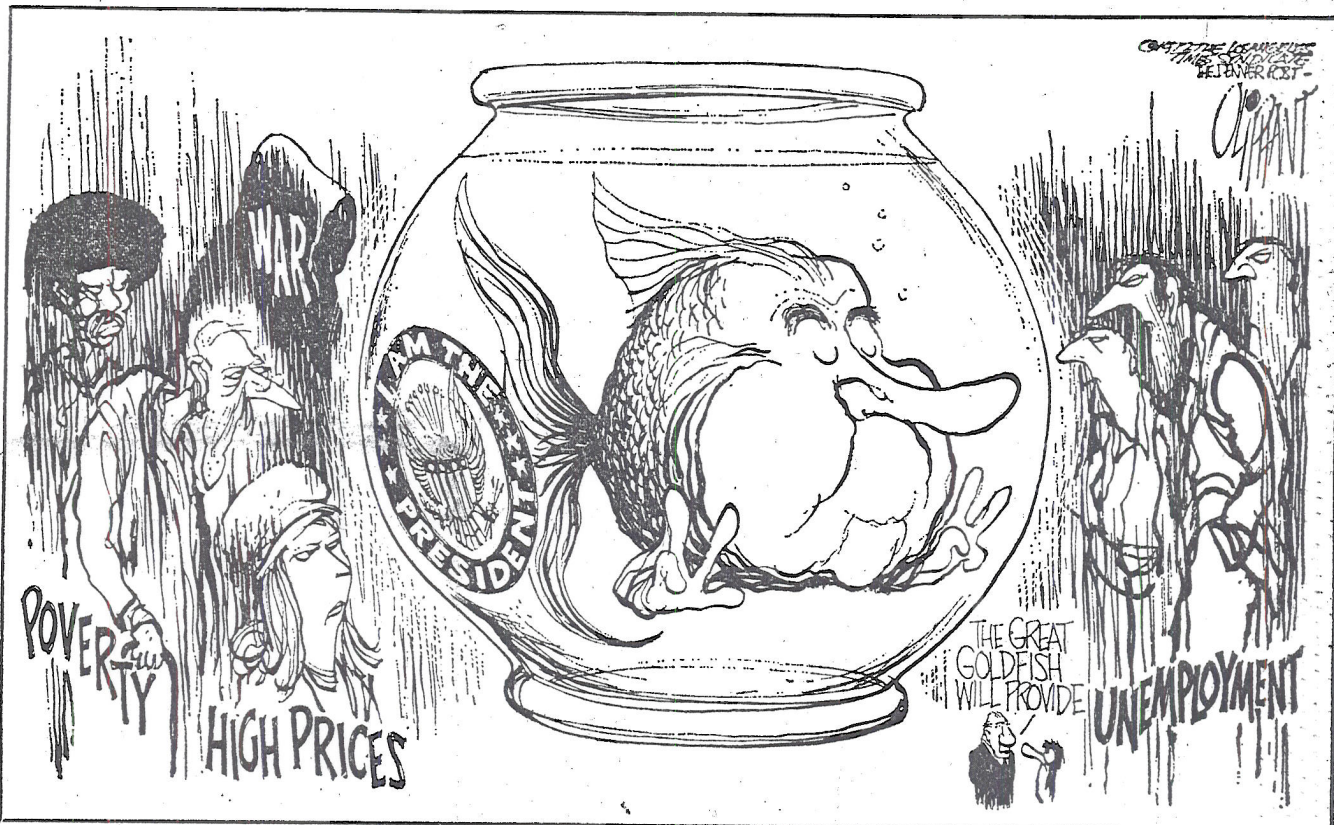
conviction that a "new American majority" already exists at the presidential level, and his hope that it might be translated into a Republican governing majority in his second term. It did not trouble the President that the majority and mandate he saw were essentially negative. Quite to the contrary. Richard Nixon's design for the next four years, as described in a

rather neglected radio address on Oct. 21, calls for getting coercive, burdensome government off people's backs and out of their lives.

"Do we want to turn more power over to the bureaucrats in Washington in the hope that they will do what is best for all the people?" asked the President in this revealing speech. "Or do we want to return more power to the people and to their state and local

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This is the first of two articles on post-election prospects. Next Sunday: Harry C. McPherson Jr. on the future of the Democrats.



Oliphant in The Denver Post

governments, so that people can decide what is best for themselves?"

Although such rhetoric echoes the traditional Republican prejudice against government, it has a sharp cutting edge created by the racial and class antagonisms that have destroyed the Democratic coalition and governing majority. The new Republican negativism is not passive as in the

close to home; or wanting to be judged fairly on your ability. Those are not values to be ashamed of; those are values to be proud of; those are values that I shall always stand up for when they come under attack."

And finally: "Fortunately, what the new majority wants for America, and what I want for this nation basically are the same . . . On matters affecting basic human values — on the way Americans live their lives and bring up their children—I am going to respect and reflect the opinion of the people themselves. That is what democracy is all about."

#### "The Damned Government"

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT to George C. Wallace, Mr. Nixon could not have stated his neo-populist and oppositionist philosophy of the presidency more eloquently. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the President has merely pre-empted Wallace's line as well as that of the middle-of-the-road Democrats. When he sees a political opportunity, as he does now, Mr. Nixon is willing to indulge himself and express his sincere, visceral conservatism.

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Hence the second Nixon administration promises to be marked by a "do-less" approach: few new starts in federal spending programs and a rigorous weeding out of failed and wasteful leftovers from the Great Society.

Particularly symbolic is the orphaned Office of Economic Opportunity, which some ranking Nixon men would simply like to abolish. The bloated and unmanageable Department of Health, Education and Welfare presents another huge and inviting target to White House economizers. So does the sprawling Department of Agriculture, which reflects in peculiarly acute form the unresponsiveness of a federal bureaucracy left to do as it pleased for most of the past two generations. A positive face will be put on any dismantling enterprise when the President reintroduces his government reorganization plan, which may gain a more sympathetic hearing in the next Congress.

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Eisenhower years, but aggressively activist.

"It is time that good, decent people stopped letting themselves be bulldozed by anybody who presumes to be the self-righteous moral judge of our society," said the President in his Oct. 21 speech. "There is no reason to feel guilty about wanting to enjoy what you get and get what you earn; about wanting your children in good schools

# The Negative President

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The combination of popular anti-government sentiment and a worsening fiscal crisis give Mr. Nixon unusual bargaining leverage with the Congress. Even though the Democrats retain control, they are bound to respect the overwhelming repudiation of the left-liberal position faithfully represented by Sen. George McGovern. With the President clearly prepared to remain on the attack against the big spenders and blame the opposition for any federal tax increase, the Democratic leadership may prove surprisingly tractable in the early stages of the second Nixon administration.

The clearest indication of a changing mood in the Congress may come if and when the administration submits a new welfare-reform proposal. The White House is now working on an approach drastically different from the 1969-model Family Assistance Plan, which Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the White House liberal-in-residence, lobbied past the President by mixing flattering historical analogies and dubious statistics. The new approach, reflecting the get-tough popular attitude, contains compulsory work requirements and harsh penalties against runaway fathers. If the Congress buys it, it may well signal the arrival of a new era of rollback and retrenchment in social policy.

At the same time, the Nixon administration will urge additional spending

for defense, largely to meet rising military pay scales, and for anti-crime measures, which enjoy enthusiastic support among the anxious "new American majority." If the left-liberal Democrats display their usual political acuity, they will do Mr. Nixon the great favor of denouncing these popular initiatives, thereby further alienating themselves from the former Democratic middle classes. This will also enable the President to remain in the aggressively negative stance he finds most congenial.

## The Fiscal Hook

BEFORE RIGHT-WING Republicans leap to the conclusion that a "golden age" looms in a second Nixon term, certain important factors relating to the political and economic underpinnings of "the new conservatism" have to be taken into account.

In his Oct. 21 radio speech, President Nixon tacitly acknowledged a major exception to his rule of smaller and less intrusive government, declaring: "The new American majority believes in taking whatever action is needed to hold down the cost of living so that everyone's standard of living can go up." In plain language, the new American majority believes that the government has the responsibility not only to curb inflation, but also, and far more importantly, to "take whatever action is needed" to guarantee its economic prosperity and security. Rhetoric alone won't fulfill that crucial responsibility.

The \$100-billion-plus budget deficits accumulated during the first four Nixon years provide disturbing evidence of fundamental disorder within the U.S. economy. Because a substantial part of recent deficits has been financed overseas, through the simple expedient of forcing foreigners to swallow tens of billions of unwanted and inconvertible dollars, the consequences of uncontrolled government spending and borrowing have been temporarily disguised. Since August, 1971, and the coming of the so-called New Economic Policy, the United States has been operating beyond the borders of the post-Keynesian conventional wisdom. What will the administration do if, simultaneously, inflation accelerates and the economy slows down? It may be faced with that question before mid-1974.

Even if the economy jogs along acceptably to the majority of Americans, the administration will not be off the fiscal hook by any means. Now that the President has found his majority, he faces the inescapable necessity of *finding* its needs and desires. A serious effort to cut back on outmoded and wasteful social welfare spending is not merely desirable, from the Republican point of view. It is imperative in order to create fiscal headroom for the inevitable expansion of welfare spending directed to powerful middle-class social and fiscal constituencies. To put the cruel imperative concretely, it becomes necessary to strong-arm welfare mothers if the retired Moms and Dads of Middle America are to be better provided for without boosting the taxes of their children.

President Nixon ought to give unswerving priority to economic

policy during his second term, but, on the basis of my own experience in working with him, I doubt that he will. He finds the *politics* of the economy interesting enough, but he is bored by the details of the complex managerial problems served up for his decision. (I must hasten to add that each of his predecessors in the postwar era has felt much the same way; what makes Mr. Nixon's situation different is the disappearance of the comfortable margin for drift and indecision.)

## Waiting To Be Led

IF THE LSD EFFECT of his landslide victory is enduring, the President may repeat the mistake of LBJ, who assumed that the priorities imposed by circumstances could be altered and deferred by fiat. For the sake of the Great Society, Lyndon Johnson escalated by stealth in Vietnam. For the sake of preserving his chosen place in history as the architect of "a generation of peace," Richard Nixon may give lip-service to a "domestic emphasis" in his forthcoming Inaugural and State of the Union messages, but actually continue to focus his attention and energies on foreign policy, with its alluring freedom of presidential decision and action.

This slogan-deep course of action may prove irresistible if 1973 fulfills its potential for labor strife and bickering over the future of wage-price controls. "The Boss would much rather deal with Brezhnev than Meany," says a Nixon aide. "If he can entertain Chou En-lai in Washington and visit Japan, he'll have two more presidential 'firsts.' He really can't get excited about the domestic stuff."

It will be a political miscalculation of the first magnitude if the

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spark of excitement is not kindled during the second Nixon term. For the President has taken his stand squarely on the commanding high ground of American politics, on the values, standards and aspirations of the great majority of citizens who have felt under political-cultural assault since the mid-1960s. Partly through Democratic default and partly through his own initiative, Mr. Nixon is in a position to move in the next four years from the defensive to the offensive, from a negative to a positive stance.

The "new American majority" is waiting to be led. In this election, the members of that majority recorded their overwhelming rejection of McGovern and his view of America. But they also revealed a distrust of the Republican alternative and, by wholesale ticket-splitting, set congressional watchdogs on the White House.

Sadly, in view of the scandals reaching into the highest echelons of the Nixon staff, the voters' precaution seems justified. Men who did not trust the democratic process to sustain them in office cannot complain about the electorate's refusal to entrust them with unbridled power.

Preparing for his second term, the President has announced his intention

to reorganize his staff and has asked for the resignations of all appointees.

Almost surely, there will be major personnel changes in the White House in the next administration, but unless "the Berlin Wall" surrounding the President is opened up, the situation will remain the same behind the facade of new faces.

For the past four years, with the re-election effort uppermost in their minds, the President and his men have pursued a campaign-oriented politics emphasizing maneuver and manipulation and salesmanship. Now, with only four more years in which to complete the record history will judge, they will feel increasing pressure to pursue a result-oriented, governing politics—if they can.

The Republican Party began the Nixon years as an unrepresentative minority of nay-sayers who lacked the imagination to comprehend and seize historic opportunities. On the evidence of last week's election, the GOP remains a minority, and its claim to speak for the new American majority remains to be validated by a popular bestowal of trust. If Nixon can somehow gain that prize, his place in history and his party's future will be secure.