# James Reston

# Nixon May Have Gone Too Far Too Fast

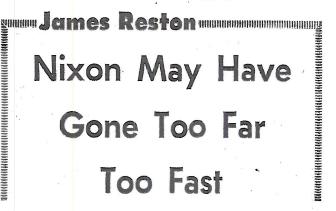**Washington**

SENATOR George McGovern based his disastrous presidential campaign on the assumption that the American people were ready for radical reform, and now President Nixon seems to be interpreting h i s spectacular victory as a mandate for dramatic conservative reform.

It could be that Mr. Nixon is making the same mistake in the opposite direction, for the reaction to his stream of budget cuts and program amendments is now flooding into Washington, and while it shows some support for modest changes, it definitely suggests that the President, like McGovern, may have gone too far.

To judge primarily by the letters coming into Capitol Hill, the President's anti-busing, anti-welfare, and anti-big-government pronouncements have been popular, but his specific proposals for cutting federal aid to housing,

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health, education, libraries, man-power training, and other employment projects, and his latest suggestion that Congress gradually eliminate federal farm subsidy payments, are raising howls of protest.

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THIS REACTION came slowly at first for a variety of reasons. First, the President did not set out to dismantle all the social programs of the Roosevelt and post-Roosevelt periods, as some of the protesting Democrats suggest. He was selective in his cuts, and took aim at several political boondoggles that most objective observers felt should have been eliminated long ago. Also, he suggested larger appropriations for some social programs — aid to the aged, for example.

Second, he fired so many programs at the Congress in a few short weeks that neither the Congress nor the press had time to analyze one program before he hit them with one or two more.

But, gradually, as the President's first few cuts accumulated into a program of substantial conservative reform, affecting the economic interests of one powerful group after another, the storms began to descend on the Congress from all over the country.

Also, the President's budget cuts coincided with steeply rising food prices and the devaluation of the dollar, which will add to the cost of imported oil, steel and many other products. The wholesale price index rose 1.6 per cent in December and 1.1 per cent in January, and the agricultural sector of the index was up 5.2 per cent in December and 2.9 per cent, seasonally adjusted, in January.

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THE ADMINISTRATION is doing its best to transform the support it got from labor in the last election into a permanent Republican gain in future elections, but when Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz went to Florida the other day to confer with the labor union leaders in convention, he was told not to expect much labor support for the Administration's cuts in the social programs.

Minnesota, which was among the 49 states that voted for Mr. Nixon in November, recently voted $691 million in state funds to assure equality of education in all communities in that state, but it did so on the assumption that federal aid to education would remain about as it did in the last budget. Now it is faced with the prospect of adding new state and local taxes if it cannot get the federal education budget cuts restored.

The state of Washington, like other states, is being warned about an impending fuel crisis in the nation, but at the same time the President has indicated that funds for their great dam and electric power system in that state are going to be cut.

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IT MAY BE, of course, that the Administration's budget is merely Mr. Nixon's negotiating position. In his exercise of power, he likes to confront his opponents with stern alternatives: bombing or peace in Vietnam; limit expenditures or I'll impound the funds above my limit; reform wasteful or outmoded programs, or I'll veto them if passed.

This makes good headlines and gives the Republican conservatives a clear rallying cry, but it also helps reunite the divided Democrats and mobilizes powerful constituencies that supported the Democrats in the past.

It would be ironic if Mr. Nixon repeated McGovern's mistake of trying to go too far too fast, but this may very well be what's happening.

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