

Matter of Fact



But Who Will Tell President Nixon?

Joseph Alsop

Fuller column filed W/gate, 19 Dec 73.

THESSE DAYS, when you see a huddle of unhappy-looking House or Senate Republicans, you can be pretty sure they are discussing the question, "Who will bell the cat?" The cat is Richard M. Nixon; and belling the cat means telling the President he must resign his office for the good of his party.

The reason is bleakly simple. The news reaching Capitol Hill from the states and congressional districts is downright horrendous. The Watergate-engendered loss of confidence in the President is said, at least by some, to be creating a situation like that in 1930. In that year, the great depression and Herbert Hoover's unpopularity produced a record massacre of Republican Senators and Representatives.

In 1930, however, the party was far better off on Capitol Hill, with an actual majority in the House of Representatives, for instance. Today, in contrast, the count of the House is 240 Democrats; 192 Republicans; one independent and two vacancies. And the Senate count is 56 to 44 — including the two conservative-independents with the Republican minority.

IMAGINE then, what the Republican plight will be, if another 40 to 50 Republican seats are lost in the House, and another five to ten Senate seats are also transferred to Democrats. That sort of result could make the House ratio close to two and one half to one in favor of the

Democrats, and the Senate ratio would be nearly as bad.

In this particular off-year, the Republicans ought to have a slight advantage in the Senate since they have only 15 seats to hang onto, whereas the Democrats have 19. In fact, however, the Democrats have almost no possibly endangered Senate seats, whereas the Republicans have remarkably few sure bets.

YOU HAVE to begin the Republican danger-list with the seats of three men who are surely leaving the Senate, plus one who is likely to do so. The three sure leavers are Wallace Bennett of Utah, Norris Cotton of New Hampshire and William Saxbe of Ohio. The likely leaver is Marlow Cook of Kentucky. But you must then add several other seats, like that of Milton Young of North Dakota, where the outlook is already extremely dark, and some further states where there could be bad trouble, like Vermont if Senator George Aiken joins the other leavers.

Such are the current Republican analyses, "unless someone screws up enough courage to tell the President he ought to get the hell out." The quotation is from a high, ruggedly partisan Republican figure. He added sadly that President Nixon was unlikely to hear the blunt truth, because "there's something about the awesomeness of that Oval Room in the White House."

So what will Richard M. Nixon do? It is an interesting question.