



Roscoe Drummond

The Evils of Watergate

WASHINGTON — President Nixon appears to assume that the American people are not deeply concerned — and shocked — by the Republican Party's alleged offense in breaking, entering and bugging the Democratic headquarters.

I am persuaded he is making a false assumption and a rather dangerous one.

HIS MISJUDGMENT, I think, comes from the polls which quite accurately show that most are going to vote for the President despite the Watergate outrage.

They reveal that most Americans do not see the Watergate affair as a determining factor in deciding how they will vote. It is far down on the list of controlling considerations in the campaign. Only 3 percent see "corruption," including Watergate with all its evil implications, as very influential in their decision.

No wonder the President and his principal political adviser, the same Richard Nixon, assume that Watergate criticism can be stared down with cool and aloof disdain.

It can as far as the 1972 election is concerned.

Since most voters feel that the war, the economy and foreign affairs are the biggest issues, you would think that most questions would concern these matters.

They don't. My experience is that most questions directly concern Watergate. And these questions come mainly from Nixon supporters.

They want to know why it was done, who authorized it, who approved the expenditure of tens of thousands of dollars to set up a system for the steady theft of the political secrets of the opposition party in a presidential election. And if those involved — closely associated with the Committee for the Re-election of the President — were acting on their own, what kind of irresponsible management is there at the head of the Republican Party?

Nothing approaching a candid answer has come from any Republican leader privy to the facts.

Spokesmen for the President have said that no one "presently" on the White House staff had anything to do with the Watergate affair. Does that in any way explain, justify or extenuate what was done — the fact that those who did it are not "presently" on the White House staff?

All the Republicans in authority have devoted themselves to criticizing the way the Democrats have criticized them for the Watergate crime but have not devoted one syllable to explaining what they did or what was done in their behalf.

UNTIL THERE IS a persuasive explanation or confession (which is good for the soul) this cannot fail to erode confidence in government and in the presidency.

This Watergate thing is like a counterintelligence operation behind the Iron Curtain. It is alien to a presidential campaign in the United States of America.