

GOP Says U.S. Yawns At Watergate

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They're talking nervously about the Watergate bugging in the offices and corridors of the White House these days—but apparently in few other places within the Republican family and America's living rooms.

A survey of GOP senators, congressmen, state chairmen and other party leaders indicates that growing anxiety within the White House about the latest Watergate developments is not yet shared by GOP pulse-takers around the country.

That anxiety is conveyed in private conversations by White House aides who acknowledge that in recent days their concern has been deepened by new allegations that John W. Dean III, counsel to the President, had advance knowledge of the bugging of Democratic Party headquarters.

"People wait for the next day's papers," one of them says. President Nixon's defense of Dean alleviates the concern but doesn't remove it entirely, he says.

The anxiety is also beginning to surface in public remarks by Republican senators.

Two Senate leaders, John Tower of Texas and Norris Cotton of New Hampshire, said yesterday that they hope the President will reverse himself and permit Dean to testify.

A third, James L. Buckley (Cons.-R-N.Y.), said that the time had come for the Nixon administration to tell the whole truth about the Watergate bugging.

But state chairmen in Virginia and New Jersey—where Republican candidates face gubernatorial elections this year—say they see little increased interest in Watergate among the voters and little increased concern among the party faithful.

"I have not detected any impact," says Richard Obenshain, the Virginia state chairman. "I've not received one comment about it."

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John Diamond, state chairman in New Jersey where Republican Gov. William T. Cahill is expected to seek re-election, says: "Watergate is a federal matter that will have little impact on the political scene during the forthcoming gubernatorial and legislative elections."

And on Capitol Hill, Republican senators and congressmen alike attest that although the latest allegations of close White House involvement in last June's bugging of Democratic headquarters have received considerable play in the local press, there is little public reaction.

Sponsors of a \$1,000-a-plate Republican "New Majority" fund-raising dinner here on May 9 for the benefit of Senate and House campaign committees and the GOP National Committee report those being asked to give are raising hardly a murmur about Watergate.

Such dinners, for which an extensive phone campaign is conducted, are often good barometers of party discontent, says Jack Calkins, executive director of the Republican congressional campaign committee.

"Obviously this is a story that isn't going to go away," he says, "but as far as picking up any danger signals on it, no."

Buehl Berentsen, director of the GOP Senate campaign committee says his dinner staff is getting "an absolute minimum of negative reaction to Watergate or anything else" from old party contributors being contacted.

In Florida, state chairman Tommy Thomas two reports attending two of the largest GOP fund-raisers ever held in Tampa and Gainesville over last weekend, at which Republicans expressed some concern about the Watergate but no demands that the White House take any particular action.

In Michigan, Jerry Roe, executive director of the Republican state committee, says about 2,200 party members paid \$135 a couple Monday night for an annual dinner in honor of Republican Gov. William G. Milliken. "The Watergate is totally unrelated to Michigan," he says. "People here may not like it, but it doesn't touch

them."

Peter O'Donnell, former GOP state chairman and national committeeman from Texas, says: "I find no pressure on it from Republicans in Texas. It's hard to sustain the interest. Allegations are made and quickly denied."

Clark Reed, the GOP state chairman in Mississippi and chairman of the organization of Southern state chairmen, says he has encounter-

ed only "mild apprehension" among fellow Republicans.

Harry S. Dent, general counsel to the Republican National Committee and former White House political adviser, says the same is true in South Carolina, where he now practices law. "Nobody's pushing the panic button at me, saying something has to be done," he says.

John Andrews, retiring Ohio state chairman, says: "I haven't had call No. 1 on that or one letter. But when the subject does come up occasionally, there is concern. It's just a damn disgrace, nobody denies that. But the play once you get across the Potomac isn't as great. We get page one stories here but they're pretty digested compared to what you see in Washington."

That point—that press coverage of the Watergate is not nearly so intensive outside Washington—is stressed by most Republicans when questioned about the impact of the case.

John D. Ehrlichman, the President's chief assistant for domestic affairs, said in a recent interview that he seldom is asked a question about Watergate when he travels around the country. The whole issue, he said, operates on two levels—media attention and the interest of the average individual, which is very low.

The nation's leading public opinion pollsters have reached the same conclusion, and none has conducted a major survey on the Watergate bugging since the November election.

Oliver Quayle, in private polling in three states two

weeks ago, says he found virtually no impact.

"Generally it showed that Watergate and the corruption issue are not hurting Nixon a great deal," he says. "It's not of great concern to the people."

Albert E. Sindlinger, president of a telephone polling operation, says: "The general reaction on Watergate up to date is a big yawn. It is amazing the low priority people put on it."

Each day, he says, he asks people what is the most interesting news item they have read or heard. During the election, he says, about 10 per cent would say Watergate "on some days." Now it's down to 2 or 3 per cent, he says.

Some of those surveyed said enough time to gauge the real impact may not have elapsed since word last Friday that James W. McCord Jr., convicted of conspiracy in the Watergate trial, had offered to provide more information to the federal judge in the case and to Senate investigators.

In the news summaries that have gone to the President the last few mornings, a staff aide said, heavy Washington, television and national newsmagazine coverage of Watergate has been reflected. Newspapers from around the country of last weekend had not arrived yet, the aide said.

A Gallup Poll on the Watergate affair planned to start April 3 may provide a better indication. But for now, the message to the White House from Republicans taking soundings around the country is one of uniform unconcern.

See also Nicholas von Hoffman, Washington Post 29 Mar 73.