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# Impact of Watergate Worries Maryland GOP

ANNAPOLIS—Sometime before last spring's Ohio presidential primary, Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) propounded the percolator theory of American politics. Jackson, then campaigning for the Democratic nomination, conceded that the issues he was raising—radicalism, marijuana, defense spending and the like—would probably not hurt Sen. George McGovern in Ohio but would have a telling effect in California, one month later.

The issues, Jackson said, would percolate.

Well, here at the Maryland state capital, the Watergate affair is beginning to percolate. Republican legislators who once dismissed the burglary and bugging as a sophomoric prank by some hyper-active Latinos are be-

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ginning to have doubts. In the bars and hotels of this city, the Watergate case has been elevated to a serious topic of concern. Men whose fealty to Republicanism is second to none suddenly have turned troubled.

The testimony of L. Patrick Gray III, the revelations concerning the independent foreign policy of International Telephone and Telegraph, and, finally, the persistent charges concerning Watergate have begun to take their toll. They have, as Jackson said in a different context, percolated down to that most ubiquitous of all political clichés—the grassroots.

Witness, for example, the reception accorded Sen. Charles McC. Mathias (R-Md.) when he visited the General Assembly a day after delivering a Senate speech on Watergate in which he questioned the Nixon administration's handling of the issue. One of the first to bounce up from his seat and say he endorsed Mathias' stand was State Sen. Robert Bauman (R-Upper Shore), a doctrinaire conservative who has not hid his desire to run against Mathias in the primary.

But if the two men have differences, it is not over Watergate. A survey of the Maryland Senate's Republicans shows them foursquare behind Mathias on this issue, a fact that pleased but nevertheless surprised the

*The writer covers the Maryland General Assembly which adjourned last week.*

senator. While their reasons for being concerned vary as much as the extent of their concern, some common themes were readily apparent.

First, each of the Maryland legislators interviewed said he initially discounted the Watergate case as being of no political significance. Not one continues to think so. Many commented with awe on the durability of the controversy and indicated that they were now giving much more credence to newspaper accounts of the subject.

Second, many reported that they were beginning to hear about Watergate "back home"—a sure sign that the issue has percolated to the grassroots. Some, like Sen. Jervis Finney (R-Baltimore County), talked in terms of "interested Republicans," "concerned party members" and "contributors," while others simply referred to phone calls. Regardless, they all now believe that Watergate had become an issue that will affect the fortunes of the Republican Party and possibly their own political careers.

Third, they all said they were dissatisfied with the White House's response to the charges, although some of the more bitter remarks were placed off the record. Interestingly, dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of Watergate was as strong among conservatives as among liberals. Thus, Sens. Newton I. Steers, a Montgomery County liberal, and Edward T. Hall, an Anne Arundel County conservative, were equally insistent that the administration should come clean and tell the public everything it knows about the bugging, the burglary and the way campaign funds were handled.

"I think the President is going to have to put his cards on the table and let the chips fall where they may," said Hall. "I think we've got to know. We've got to find out."

Similarly, Steers used words like "despicable" and "terrible" in talking about the Watergate case and said he was "exasperated" by the way "certain officials have handled the matter."

"My sentiments," he said, "are not anti-Nixon. They are pro-Republican Party."

All of this represents quite a dramatic change from last fall when, as recently as the November general elections, not a single Republican official though the case was a political issue or publicly called upon the White House to settle the matter

once and for all. Then the Watergate case was a petty annoyance that in no way affected local races or the fortunes of men who pride themselves on being the grassroots of their party.

That has all changed. Most of those interviewed now consider Watergate to be a personal affront to politicians everywhere. It is one thing to lay blame for the deed on a group of second-story men and quite another matter when the trail begins to lead to men who sit on the board of directors of the Republican Party.

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Edward Mason (R-Western Maryland)—and reported no flack from back home, talked about how his personal standing as a politician had been diminished by a burglary executed in the name of politics.

The point, while self-serving, is not to be dismissed lightly. These are men, after all, who work very hard and take themselves seriously. They have read the polls and they know that the public now ranks them somewhere, below used car salesmen in terms of trust and integrity. It hurts, and they have said so time and time again on the floor of the Senate.

As a result, they have passed a disclosure act for all public officials, tightened an already tight campaign spending law and revised their code of ethics. There are crooks among them, surely, but they would prefer not to be judged by that standard. That Watergate has become a standard of sorts—like Hollywood divorces or the Black Sox scandals—cheapens a profession that is already tarnished.

"I'm terribly upset," said State GOP Chairman Alexander Lankler. "I'm the guy who's trying to get guys into the system and look what the system looks like."

"I'm upset. I'm getting more and more upset all the time."

Watergate has percolated.