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WASHINGTON, April 25— Using the Easter recess to gauge the impact of the Watergate scandal, members of Congress from around the country report a sense of frustration and impotence on the part of increasingly concerned voters at home.

Reports from Congressmen in both parties in 20 states this week indicates that the issue has begun to define itself in the minds of voters more as a moral than a political problem.

Few Congressmen report a spontaneous outpouring of sentiment on the issue, but nearly all say once the question is raised, their constituents wonder, as one said, "Where it will all end."

Typical of the responses are the following:

¶ "The Republicans here are unhappy," says Representative Henry P. Smith 3d of upstate New York. "Most of them because it was such a stupid thing and, as I said in a television interview, 'I hate to belong to a stupid party.'"

¶ Representative Frank Thompson Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, reports little reaction from his constituents but has concluded that "most people believe the House of Representatives can't do anything about the situation."

¶ Representative J. John Heinz 3d, Republican of Pennsylvania, and a potential candidate for Governor, cited the following letter from one voter: "If you expect to be in good political shape yourself come 1974 you will stand apart from the overcrassness that is going on in the White House."

¶ A Republican state Senator in Minnesota is urging party members to withhold contributions to the national party until they can be assured that "it will be spent in a manner consistent with the highest political ethics."

A Walk in Wilmington

Perhaps typical of the reaction found in home communities was that which met Delaware's lone Representative, Pierre S. duPont 4th, a Republican. Mr. duPont spent the first days of the week walking through the Wilmington area to check reactions.

Congressmen Find Constituents Feel Issue Is Moral

During a day and a half tour, which included public buildings and city streets and an hour on a radio talk show, Mr. duPont was never asked about Watergate unless he first raised the issue. Food prices, environmental issues, Cambodia bombing, retirement benefits and local issues dominated his conversations with voters.

For a man emerging from the politically charged atmosphere of Washington the experience was similar to decompression for the 38-year-old Representative. Attempting to put it in his own perspective, he said: "There hasn't been time yet for the issue to jell and for a lot of people it will never be as important as food prices or that hole in the street in front of their homes."

But, he added: "From my own point of view it is very serious—it goes to the heart of things because our system damned well won't work if people don't have respect for their leadership. There just is no excuse for high-ranking public officials condoning or encouraging violations of the law."

Professionals Disturbed

Much of Mr. du Pont's concern about the matter comes from the kind of reaction he gets from professional party workers who, like himself, are more closely following the unfolding story.

Uniformly these people in Delaware's largest city report growing concern and disaffection with the party.

"It's not like a storm," said Thomas Little, a candidate for state party chairman. "A storm comes up quick and you weather it and then recover. But, this is like a slow, steady rain and it is chilling the Republican party to its bones."

In the back of their minds, too, is the old image of Richard M. Nixon — one held by many Republicans in Delaware. It's something that comes out in subtle ways, like Senator

William V. Roth's comment on Monday to a meeting of young Republicans. Condemning the incident, Mr. Roth added:

"I agree with President Eisenhower that a man in public life must be 'clean as a hound's tooth.'"

He was quoting General Eisenhower's reaction to an earlier scandal about campaign finances that threatened to end Mr. Nixon's political career.

Because of similar reactions, some Republican Congressmen report growing problems.

"I'm on the defensive," complains Representative Herman I. Schneebeli, Republican of Pennsylvania, "and I'd rather have the thing go away. I do not know the facts and until I do will reserve judgment. I say it's too early to speak out on the issue although I do respond when I'm asked about it."

Representative William S. Cohen of Maine, a Republican who is a freshman in Congress, believes the question has become serious.

"I'm asking for not only more public officials to express outrage," he said, "but also for the public to do the same because I think it's a dangerous step if we are not shocked and outraged by Government officials and employes listening in with electronic equipment to private conversations."

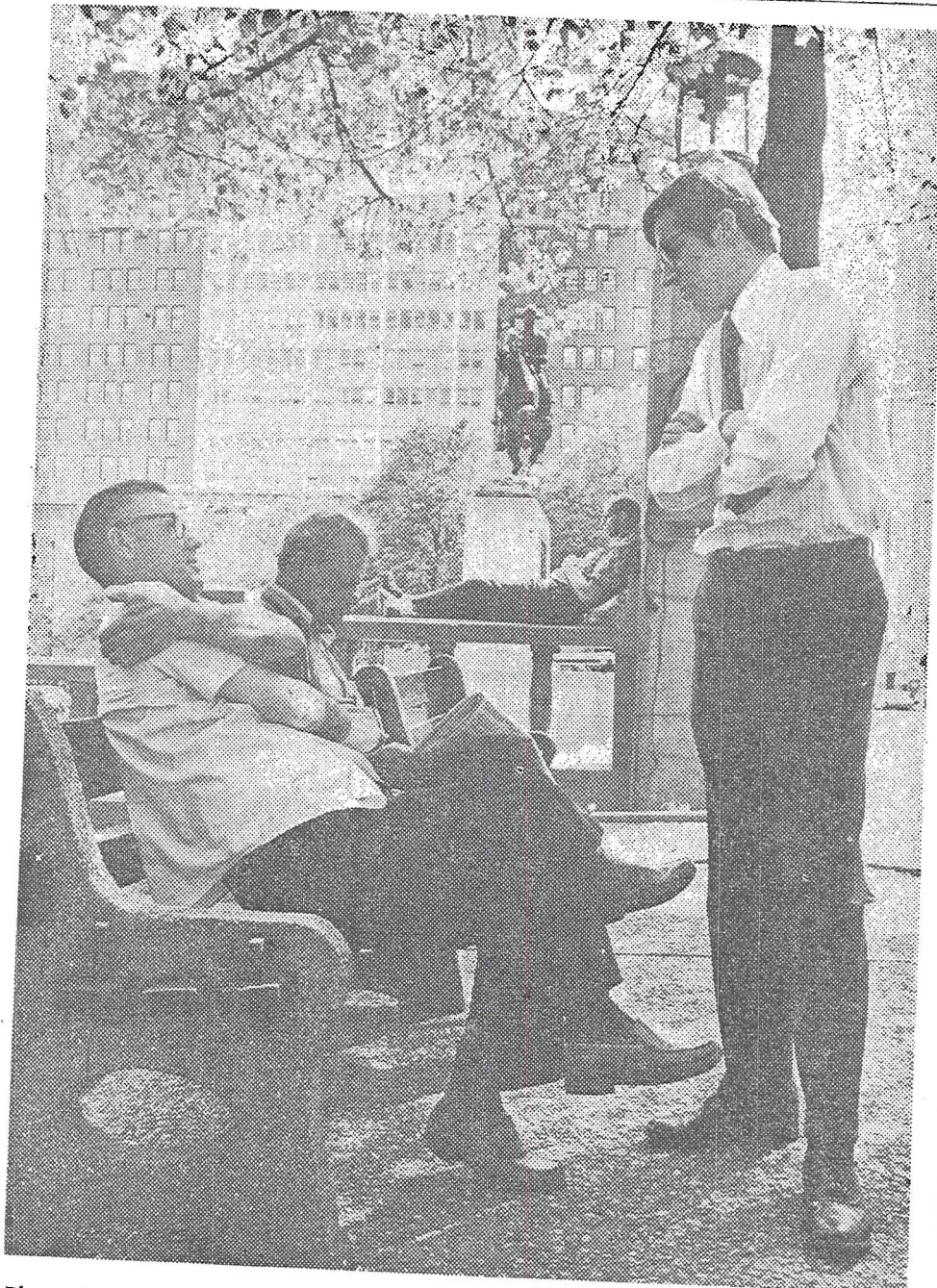
Representative Elwood W. Hillis, a Republican of Indiana, met the issue on Easter Sunday.

"The first person to approach me at church," he said, "was a former Republican Mayor of Kokomo who said he is dismayed by the potential damage to future Republican changes. As Republicans there is no way for us to disregard Watergate."

The confusion for many voters seemed reflected in a conversation between Mr. duPont and a student at Delaware University.

"I have to live with this," he told the student, "I'm a Republican. What do you suggest I ought to do?"

"Write your Congressman" the young woman said. Then she blushed and mumbled, "Oh, my God, you are the Congressman."



Pierre S. du Pont 4th, standing, Delaware's only member of the House of Representatives, talking with a man in a park in Wilmington. Mr. du Pont visited various communities to get voters' views, and found food prices, environmental issues, bombing in Cambodia and retirement benefits most in the minds of the general public.

The New York Times/Robert M. Klein