

WATERGATE FOUND AIDING CONGRESS

**President's Power Believed
Declining—More G.O.P.
Independence Expected**

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Key figures in Congress are convinced that Watergate will prove to be President Nixon's Waterloo in the struggle for supremacy between Republicans in the White House and Democrats on Capitol Hill.

"I should think the influence of the White House has been diminished, certainly in the short run," Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the Democratic whip, declared in an interview.

His judgment was shared by a number of Republican leaders and strategists who reassembled today in the capital after a 10-day Congressional holiday.

The campaign adviser to a group of Senate Republicans seeking re-election in 1974 said that some of them were likely to begin demonstrating independence from the President on major issues — spending, for instance, and the bombing in Indochina—in an effort to preserve their own images with voters back home.

Vetoes May Be Harder

A ranking member of the House Republican leadership offered the private assessment that he would be hard pressed to duplicate the President's earlier successes in sustaining vetoes of spending measures.

One staff member who works for a Senate Republican leader summed up the situation in blunt terms:

"Let's face it. It's every man for himself here and the first objective is going to be to stay in office. After President Nixon's landslide a lot of members figured, 'What the heck, Nixon must be on the right track,' and they strung along with him.

"Now they're bound to sit back and say, 'What kind of a crew is that down there?'"

The attitude of Congressional Republicans is the linchpin in the political machine with which the White House has sought to dominate the Congress. The Republicans lack a majority in both the Senate and House, but their numbers are large enough in both chambers to sustain the President when it counts, on the two-thirds vote needed, for example, to override a veto.

Solidity May Vanish

When the Congress recessed before Easter, Republicans and some conservative Democrats had been solid in their support of Mr. Nixon. They crushed a Democratic attempt in the House to force the Administration to roll back prices. They forced the House leaders to shelve a bill that would continue an emergency public employment program. They delayed action in a Senate committee on a bill to open up the Presidential budget process to Congressional authority.

But all of that has been altered, in the view of individuals interviewed over the last few days, because of the revelations of high-level White House involvement in the Watergate conspiracy or its cover-up.

"I'd hate to see a veto come up [for an override test] any time soon," said the veteran political adviser to a senior Republican in the Senate.

"Each one of these guys who has got to run next year is going to have to, in one way or another, establish some distance between himself and the President," the aide continued. "It'll show up in lack of support for his program. This isn't a very rational thing for them to do, but scared politicians seldom act rationally."

Another Republican, a campaign specialist, described a strategy meeting two weeks ago at which it was agreed that Republicans in need of the most political help next year were those who had been differing with Mr. Nixon on issues.

"The situation has turned around," the political adviser said. "The guys who are being seen as the dupes of the White House are suddenly the ones who are in trouble."

Credibility Questioned

Democrats profess to foresee the same change in atmosphere.

"The credibility of the White House has been impaired," Senator Byrd said. "To that extent, the independence of some Senators with relation to the White House is bound to be affected."

Another Democrat, who described having suffered through a collapse of White House influence when President Johnson's Vietnam policies encountered widespread opposition, said it seemed clear that Mr. Nixon was now "operating from a position of weakness. People in the White House may not be as quick to throw their weight around."

Among the cross section of Republicans whose opinions were elicited—invariably with the stipulation that their remarks be unattributed—only one, a Senate member of the party hierarchy, saw any good resulting from the Watergate conspiracy.

The Senator said that the President might now be persuaded that the aides who had seemingly misled him on Watergate could have misled him on other matters.

"The President may be relying a little more on counsel from the leadership [in Congress] that has been loyal to him," he said. "It could lead to an improvement in personal ties."

But the predominant view was that of one Congressional observer who noted that Mr. Nixon had surveyed flood damage along the swollen Mississippi River on Friday. "Maybe," he said, "the President will now declare Washington a disaster area, too."