



Solutions Other Than Impeachment

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THE FIRST sessions of the Senate Watergate Committee express the true genius of American politics. The showing of steadiness, fairness — even dullness — is just what the doctor ordered for the country.

If that approach can be maintained in the Congress, then we may be able to avoid the worst outcome of Watergate — impeachment. For the fact is that the American political genius offers many punishments more fit for the Watergate crime.

The essential crime of Watergate is gross abuse of presidential government. To secure advantages for Mr. Nixon, his men engaged vital branches of government in serious criminal action.

No one who has followed Watergate believes the President was totally in the dark about these desperate doings. Heavy circumstantial evidence suggests he knew a great deal. So impeachment may be unavoidable.

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BUT NO ONE can be eager for it. It is the ultimate sanction, and the proceedings can create political turmoil and bring the business of government to a virtual halt. Sympathy would surely build for Mr. Nixon.

Even if Mr. Nixon were convicted, the country would have Spiro Agnew in the White House. Nothing in the Vice President's background, even hints of presidential dimensions.

Moreover, it is not as though it were impeachment or nothing. Once the Watergate disease is seen as part of a system, other cures come to mind.

The sovereign remedy is a return to the principle of a mixed government with balanced powers. The critical condition is

that Congress finally shake itself loose from its eagerness to have the wool pulled over its eyes in foreign policy and its appetite for small favors in domestic affairs.

The starting point is to bring the Congress abreast of the executive branch in information. Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, who is now presiding over the Watergate hearings, and that conscience of the Senate, Charles Mathias of Maryland, are preparing legislation which would require all executive departments and agencies to reply to congressional questioning and to make available to the standing committees of the Congress all information (including classified information) that does not involve intimate advice to the President himself.

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A SECOND critical curb on abuse of presidential government is raised by the proposals on war powers and executive agreements which are now before the Congress. Under the best of these measures, the President would be required to come to the Congress for approval before engaging any American forces in military action of a sustained kind.

Finally, reform of campaign laws is in order so that candidates can at least afford to be honest. A simple provision for public financing of campaigns can put the big donors out of business.

The point of all this is that the country can handle Watergate without going nuts. We don't have to borrow the British cabinet system; or take the extreme measure of impeachment; nor force a resignation. We can meet this crisis, as we have met past crises, by actions consistent with our customs, our precedents and our truly resilient political system.