

The Quality of a Loner

This discussion between Dan Rather, C.B.S. White House correspondent, and Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, was part of a C.B.S. News special report on the anniversary of the Watergate break-in.

DAN RATHER: What can the President do? What needs to be done most right now?

SENATOR BARRY GOLDWATER: Most, he has to convince the American people that he's telling the truth. Now, I don't know how he's going to do that. I don't buy the idea that he has to have a press conference because you can get into every subject in the world but Watergate if you have a press conference.

I don't see any advantage to his making a national television statement again. He's done this again and released another rather lengthy document that maybe half the people believed.

I think he has to do everything in his power to convince the people that he's innocent of a cover-up and, two, that come hell or high water he's going to be the President and leader of this country.

RATHER: Senator, should President Nixon resign?

GOLDWATER: No. I don't think he should. And I don't think he should be impeached. Now, I might not take that position if it could be proven without any question that he's lying. But I don't think he's lied. I don't think it can be proved even if he did lie. And I think the danger to the American—the danger to the country would be so great in these very pressing times overseas that I don't think it would be worthwhile risking it.

Now, if it gets down to the fact that he has been guilty, and I don't think he has, I would say resignation would be the cheapest, easiest, and quickest way and put Agnew in and get going. But I don't expect anything to happen to bring that about.

RATHER: Senator, you've known Richard Nixon for a long while, in his moments of victory and moments of defeat. How much, if any, of what has happened can be traced to his quality as a loner?

GOLDWATER: I think probably most of the trouble he had is the fact that he's never been able to be one of the boys. Now, I've seen him on occasion sort of let his hair down and there's no more delightful man in the world, no more communicative a man than Richard Nixon is when you catch him in those few, rare moments when he isn't measuring every single word he says or every gesture he makes.

His biggest weakness has been the fact that he's lived his life by himself. He's never let his hair down to friends. He's never asked enough friends what he's done wrong or what he's done good. So I'd have to say that's his problem.

RATHER: How badly has—or has it—Mr. Nixon's support eroded among conservatives?

GOLDWATER: I'd hate to take a guess. I don't think it's eroded to any great extent. There are many conservatives who have not liked his leftward trend since he's been President, so that hasn't changed anything. I think on the whole, the conservative has defended Mr. Nixon not so much because of Mr. Nixon but because of the office and that's the important thing.

I think the conservative, in fact, I think the whole Congress has been pretty doggone decent about this whole thing, to tell you the truth.

RATHER: Democrats, included?

GOLDWATER: Absolutely.

RATHER: Do you have a sense now, do you think now the President has a sense of the political damage that has been done and a determination to help put it back together himself?

GOLDWATER: I'd have no way of knowing. We haven't talked. The only talk we've had since this trouble started was he invited me to represent him at the Paris Air Show. Now, the fact is, he's appointed Mel Laird and I think obviously brought Bryce Harlow back in the act, in the back

room, sort of way. . . .

RATHER: Is it the constitutional aspects of some of the alleged acts that bother you most?

GOLDWATER: Yes and no. The thing that gets to me—my favorite word is bug—things that used to bug me—I've got to think up a new word.

The thing that bothers me is here I have spent over a third of my life, trying to build the Republican party, adding my little bit to it, having been successful in the South and in the Southwest, and then all of a sudden, as I near the end of my time in politics, I wonder—what the hell's it all been for?

Here we are just drifting around. More independents than Democrats or Republicans. And we need a two-party system.

I feel terribly let down. Frankly. The feeling that it prevails over every other feeling. I just—I get up in the mornings and I think, oh, well, what the hell, what can you do?