

# Watergate Factor Vital To Finch

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How strong will the political undertow of Watergate be in the 1974 midterm elections.

For Robert H. Finch, who left the White House soon after last year's election to re-establish a political foothold in his native state of California, the question is crucial.

He had planned to announce for the 1974 governor's race, or even perhaps challenge Democratic incumbent Alan Cranston for the U.S. Senate. Now, in light of Watergate, he probably will postpone this decision at least for awhile.

Finch flatly denies any personal knowledge of or involvement with the scandal. He says neither a grand jury nor congressional probers have even approached him for information. However, he is slow to say that the Watergate affair will not hurt him and other Republicans in bids for office in 1974.

Watergate-related factors that could determine Finch's future include political reassessments by incumbents and whether campaign funds might dry up for him and for other Republicans.

Until recently, the former presidential counselor, secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and lieutenant governor of California had committed himself to a gubernatorial bid, insiders say.

Two-term Governor Ronald Reagan, under whom Finch served from 1966 to 1968, has said he would not run again. The governor still stands by that decision publicly.

Yet Reagan is interested in the Republican presidential nomination in 1976, and leading Republicans are reportedly urging him to stay in the governor's chair, which is far removed from Watergate and other national pressures.

Some sources also believe that New York Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller's decision to seek a fifth term, viewed by many as a maneuver for a Republican presidential bid, could influence Reagan to seek to remain in Sacramento.

Reagan and Rockefeller, along with Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew and new White House adviser John B. Connally, now head most lists of 1976 Republican presidential aspirants.

Finch, whose liberal-to-moderate political philosophy often clashed with the conservative leanings of Gov. Reagan, strongly hints he will not buck the governor in the Republican primary if he does seek a third term in the Sacramento statehouse.

What about the U.S. Senate?

Finch leans toward the Senate professionally, but away from it politically.

One reason is that the incumbent, Cranston, California's senior senator, is considered to be in a strong position for re-election. For a while, Gov. Reagan looked toward Capitol Hill. But close advisers are said to have discouraged him from what could have been a tough, and losing, contest with Sen. Cranston.

In seeking a U.S. Senate seat, Finch would face the same liabilities. Additionally, and perhaps more important, as a non-incumbent, he would be faced with the task of raising substantial campaign funds to launch such a challenge.

Finch admits privately that the tide of Watergate, and the probable resulting constraints on use and availability of campaign funds, could greatly hamper his Senate bid.

However, he sees the situation itself as healthy, encouraging more campaign volunteers and fewer "hired guns."

Regardless of these considerations, insiders here believe that Finch has bided his political time long enough and is likely to seek some elective office, either next year or in 1976.

Although the former White House adviser denies interest in returning to the presidential inner circle, even if invited by Mr. Nixon, he maintains personal confidence in the President.

He says that his underlying commitment is to the office of the presidency, the functions of government, and to the Republican Party.

He feels strongly that if the commitment of some fellow Republicans had been "institutional" rather than "personal," Watergate would never have happened.