



The President's Growing Problems

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PRESIDENT NIXON'S illness is a portent no one can miss. It comes at a time of mounting difficulty in dealing with the Watergate scandal.

It is set against a background of poor choices in the major domestic and foreign business before the country. Thus, the personal misfortune offers what is perhaps the best exit from an otherwise impossible set of circumstances.

By themselves the Watergate developments of the past week were bad enough. In testimony before the Senate investigating committee, former Attorney General John Mitchell showed himself to be the wildest man associated with Mr. Nixon. Mitchell constantly minimized the charges of illegal actions which had been hurled at him by witnesses galore.

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BUT THERE was no gainsaying one point developed in cross-examination of Mitchell by the Senate committee. He had met with the President on March 22, a day after Mr. Nixon had had from his former counsel John Dean a fairly thorough airing of the Watergate crime and cover-up. Mitchell had not mentioned the cover-up at that meeting, nor had the President asked him about it. The hearings demonstrated beyond doubt that Mr. Nixon closed his eyes and shut his ears to Watergate.

The next witness, special White House counsel Richard Moore, was supposed to be the star for the defense. He had come forward at his own request to rebut John Dean's charges. His story cast some doubt on how much Dean actually told the President on March 21, and equally on whether

the President had suspected the coverup before that date.

But under questioning, Moore wilted. The best witness the White House had lined out to be no witness at all.

On top of that poor showing at the Senate hearings, there were other troubles associated with Watergate. Public interest in the financing of the President's house at San Clemente has mounted to the point where it seems to eclipse the Watergate issue itself.

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APART FROM the Watergate troubles, moreover, two additional troubles of immense scope confront the President. Galloping inflation has built a case of economic jitters. There is now widespread demand that the President prove he can manage the economy effectively.

Nor can the trouble be offset by progress in foreign policy. Mr. Nixon's claim of peace with honor is being discounted by the continuation of fighting and political instability in Indochina. Events there, if they are tending anywhere, are moving toward the resurrection of the President's old Cambodian enemy, Prince Sihanouk.

Finally, Mr. Nixon's personal staff is in disarray. His closest friends have been forced out. He seems to have doubts about such advisers as Mel Laird, and the White House is confused to the point where official spokesmen have been putting down the President's daughter, Julie Eisenhower.

But the illness, depending on developments, opens a third possibility—a retirement for health reasons.