



# President's Support Eroded in Congress

David Broder

**N**UMBERS make gritty reading, but sometimes they tell you more about what's going on than much of the rhetoric that comes out of Washington.

Here is a number that I think says a lot about the shift in the political climate of this country and what it has done to President Nixon's prospects in the returning 93rd Congress:

Support for the President's positions on roll-call votes this year, among the 13 Republican senators up for re-election in 1974, has fallen 17 percentage points from those same senators' support last year.

Senator Edward J. Gurney (Rep-Fla.), a familiar figure on the Watergate Investigating Committee, backed Mr. Nixon on 89 per cent of the votes in 1972. So far this year, he's been with the President just 59 per cent of the time.

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**S**ENATOR MILTON R. YOUNG (Rep-N.D.), the shy, quiet 75-year-old, was with Mr. Nixon 85 per cent of the time last year. Now facing the prospect of a race against popular ex-Governor William L. Guy (Dem), his support of the President has dropped to 56 per cent.

The presidential support score of Senator Bob Dole, the 1971-72 Republican national chairman, who is trailing in re-election polls in Kansas, is down 24 points. Four other Republican stalwarts facing the voters next year — Senators George Aiken of Vermont, Barry Goldwater of Arizona, Peter Dominick of Colorado and Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma — have cut their support of the President by more than 20 per cent.

These figures are derived from a study by Congressional Quarterly. They bespeak a political earthquake.

As Alan Ehrenhalt, author of the Congressional Quarterly study, is careful to note, the general falloff in support for the President's position among members of both parties in both houses in Congress results from more than Watergate.

But there is no ignoring the Watergate factor in the growing desire of members of Congress to get some distance between themselves and the President. Ehrenhalt reports that Mr. Nixon's position was sustained on 52 per cent of the rollcalls between January 3 and April 17 — the date on which he announced "major new developments" in the Watergate case. Since April 17 he has won only 39 per cent of the rollcalls.

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**T**HE CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY figures show that last year the 13 Republican senators up next year had backed the President 66 per cent of the time and opposed him 21 per cent of the time (absences accounting for the remaining 13 per cent). They were exactly in line with the Senate Republican average.

But this year, the 13 facing the voters next year have cut their support of the President an average of 17 per cent, while the other 24 Republican holdovers have moved only nine points away from the President. If there is any reason for that sharp disparity between the two groups of Republicans, other than the Watergate-induced desire to avoid looking like a "Nixon rubber stamp" next year, it does not come readily to mind.