

# The Cox Affair's Political

# Fallout

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In forcing through his own "compromise solution" to the Watergate tapes controversy at the cost of fresh turmoil in his troubled administration, President Nixon has risked his dwindling political capital on what may prove to be a last roll of the dice.

Conservative White House advisers who applauded the showdown move, predicted yesterday that Mr. Nixon will achieve a political vindication comparable to what Harry Truman eventually won for his firing of General Douglas MacArthur.

But other Republicans inside and outside the administration said the dismissal of special prosecutor Archibald Cox and the subsequent departures of the top two Justice Department officials, Elliot L. Richardson and William D. Ruckelshaus, would split the GOP leadership into warring factions and leave the President more vulnerable to impeachment or other political retribution.

## IMPEACH

Whether a serious impeachment effort would begin when the House of Representatives returns tomorrow was in doubt last night. Democratic leaders expressed general indignation at Saturday's dramatic developments, but no immediate consensus emerged on what the congressional majority should do.

Some Democratic officials, mindful of the reluctance of such men as Speaker Carl Albert to take responsibility for resolving the national leadership crisis, predicted that the situation could become as abrasive inside their party as it is within the GOP.

House minority leader Gerald R. Ford (Rep-Mich.), Mr. Nixon's choice to replace Spiro Agnew, is left in limbo by this weekend's developments, his confirmation likely to face a long delay in Congress.

The succession of shocks rattled politicians in both parties — but particularly the Republicans.

"I just can't believe what's going on in that zoo," Wyoming Republican chairman Jack Speight told the Associated Press. "It's like 'tune in tomorrow for the next adventure.'"

## SPLIT

Early indications pointed to the likelihood of a split between the GOP's progressive and conservative wings. Presidential assistant Patrick J. Buchanan, a contact point and spokesman within the White House, said many conservatives are calling in to say Cox should never have been appointed in the first place, so it's good riddance.

Neither Richardson nor Ruckelshaus were particularly trusted or admired by GOP conservatives, so their departure will not be mourned in that wing of the party, either.

On the other hand, many prominent progressive Republican rallied immediately to the side of the resigned officials and voiced at least some criticism of the President.

Typical of them was Governor William G. Milliken of Michigan, who said, "I deplore what happened. It is a setback in efforts to restore

public confidence in government."

The prevailing White House view is that time is on the side of the President, that as the shock of what is being called the "Saturday Night Massacre" wears off, the legality and propriety of Mr. Nixon's actions will be broadly endorsed by Republicans.

Presidential adviser Buchanan said, "The early (adverse) reaction came from the liberals, but now you'll see things start to swing back. Congress can do nothing before Tuesday, and by then there will be a realization that the President has done nothing illegal."

Buchanan likened Mr. Nixon's actions to Truman's firing of MacArthur for refusing to obey White House orders during the Korean war. "It's unpopular as hell when it first breaks," Buchanan said, "but when you stop to think about it for a moment, you know he's got a right to do it. And you don't go after a President for making an unpopular decision, especially in a period of international crisis like this."

## ANALYST

But a public opinion analyst with close White House ties said he thought the administration's optimism was ill-founded.

"The President is in terrible shape," he said. "He seems to do things that put him in more of a corner all the time. If there were any people in the administration that had credibility of their own, they were (Secretary of State Henry) Kissinger, Richardson and Ruckelshaus. Now, two of the three have resigned on a matter of principle.

"This has to hurt him — particularly among those Republicans who have reluctantly supported the President because they suspected the Watergate committee was out to get him for partisan reasons."

## DEMOCRATS

While most of the worries belonged to the Republicans yesterday, there were signs of possible problems ahead for Democrats.

Party leaders outside Congress were expressing condemnation of the President's actions and calling for impeachment or some other strong reaction.

But there was no evidence last night that the Democratic congressional leadership was ready to move in that direction. While more of the party's moderates discussed impeachment than ever before, the top leaders of the House and Senate remained noncommittal.

Albert — who is next in succession to the presidency until Ford is confirmed as the new vice president — was described by friends as being acutely embarrassed at the possibility that an impeachment move might be viewed by the public as a selfishly motivated effort by the Democrats to make him the new president.