

Mr. Nixon's Plight: 'A Day Late, a Dollar Short'

This morning Republican National Chairman George Bush is expected to announce that he will not be a candidate for governor of Texas.

One reason, according to Bush's friends, is that he wants to stay around to help the Republican National Committee out of its post-Watergate difficulties. But a more pressing reason is that an informal canvass of Texas, where Richard Nixon received 66 per cent of the vote in 1972 and the GOP gubernatorial candidate won 48 per cent, shows that Republican political prospects in Texas are nearly zero in 1974.

Bush is probably the most attractive candidate Republicans could hope to field in Texas, and the White House

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has been promoting his candidacy since last summer. His own negative assessment of his political chances shows a recognition of political reality that should speak volumes to Mr. Nixon, if he chooses to listen.

It is a recognition possessed by Republican politicians in all sections of the country, except possibly the Deep South where Mr. Nixon will conduct the public portion of Operation Clear-the-Air.

Last Sunday in Denver, for instance, the Young Republicans staged a Support-the-President rally that was widely advertised in advance. Only 35 persons showed up.

In the same state, Rep. William L. Armstrong, who directed Mr. Nixon's re-election effort in Colorado, wrote a two-page letter to constituents explaining that the President's dismissal of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox was a "breach of faith."

In a large midwestern state, a party official who has been trying to line up attractive candidates for 1974 put it this way: "The money has dried up. And so have the candidates, at least the candidates who are any good." In a nearby state, one of the potentially strong U.S. Senate candidates, Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, proved his point a few days later when he declined to run for the Senate because of the "spectre of Watergate."

Human Events, the Washington voice of the Republican right wing, this week assessed the 1973 elections in which Republicans lost a fifth of their delegation in the Virginia legislature, took a severe drubbing in Pennsylvania and Connecticut and lost con-

trol of the New Jersey legislature for only the third time in the century.

"Only one year after the President's landslide victory," said Human Events, "the voters across the land have displayed spirited anti-Republican feelings which can largely be attributed to the President's inability to pull himself loose from the Watergate Tar Baby."

"What many GOP pros fear pri-



George Bush

vately, moreover, is that unless the President can somehow neutralize this debilitating issue, the Republican Party will suffer a massive defeat in the 1974 congressional elections, providing the Democrats with a fully veto-proof Congress and the ability to reverse the 1972 mandate."

It is within this context that last week's lukewarm response to President Nixon by the Republican Coordinating Committee and by many individual congressmen must be assessed. While some Republicans are still desperately eager to believe the President, he can hardly take any comfort from the Coordinating Committee's curtly worded resolution calling for "full disclosure" on Watergate and

welcoming the limited disclosure so far made by the White House.

None of the Republicans on the Coordinating Committee, a group that includes governors, senators, congressmen and party officials, promised to accept Mr. Nixon's conclusions about the Watergate coverup. Gov. Robert D. Ray of Iowa put it most bluntly when he said that the President would have to solve his own problems because "we don't know what went on."

Another committee member said that the meeting was the first step in a "delicate process of party disassociation" from Mr. Nixon. The second step, presumably, will be to take formal party positions on Watergate in the event that Mr. Nixon's latest explanation fails to salvage his eroding credibility.

In truth, even many of Mr. Nixon's previously devoted supporters within the party no longer think he can make it. They are unimpressed by Operation Clear-the-Air because they argued to deaf ears in the White House that Mr. Nixon should undertake precisely such an operation last spring and summer when his public support figures and his credibility still remained at reasonably high levels. The President is now doing what the responsible members of his own party have called upon him to do. But it is the view of many of these politicians that Mr. Nixon is both a day late and a dollar short.



Rep. John B. Anderson