

GOP Badly Hurt, Gallup Says

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MEMPHIS, Nov. 19 — The dean of the nation's pollsters told Republican governors today that it is "wishful thinking" to believe that the GOP will not be badly hurt by Watergate.

Dr. George Gallup Sr. said that analysis of this month's election returns and his own polling data show that the Republican Party has been

badly damaged by the Watergate scandal.

"If anybody doubts the effect on Watergate on state and local elections, he should study the election results," Gallup said. "While many dismiss the elections of this month throughout the nation as being mixed, the fact is they point unmistakably to serious problems which the Republican Party must face in 1974."

Gallup said that state elections in New Jersey and local elections in Connecticut

show that "frustrated voters had taken their feelings out on the GOP. He also said that the voting turnout was low because many Republicans stayed home.

Gallup, the founder and chairman of the American Institute of Public Opinion, said that a smaller percentage of Americans say they would vote for Republican congressional candidates today than at any time since he began polling in 1935. He

See GOVERNORS, A8, Col. 1

GOVERNORS, From A1

called congressional elections the real barometer of party strength, and said that if elections were held now Republicans might win less than one-third of the congressional seats and lose the ability to sustain President Nixon's vetoes.

The veteran pollster was the leadoff speaker in the winter conference of the Republican Governors Association, where concern about the impact of Watergate is a topic of preoccupation. The governors will meet behind closed doors with Mr. Nixon here Tuesday to ask questions about Watergate and other issues.

In advance of that meeting, the governors today approved unanimously a broadly worded resolution commending the President for his "outstanding accomplishments in international and domestic affairs." They singled out his efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, anti-inflation measures and Mr. Nixon's recent energy message.

But the Republican governors were more reserved on Watergate. Last May in New York they had approved a statement that said, in part, "We support the President, we believe the President." The resolution today said:

"We applaud the determination of the President to make full disclosure to the public concerning Watergate, and we look forward to his visit to this conference tomorrow as a part of that effort."

The statement on Watergate was included in the resolution on the urging of Gov. Meldrim Thomson Jr.

of New Hampshire, one of Mr. Nixon's staunchest backers here. Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York and Gov. Daniel J. Evans of Washington worded the statement so that it became, in effect, an endorsement of Mr. Nixon's "full disclosure" efforts rather than support for what full disclosure might bring.

While all of the Republican governors appeared anxious to see Mr. Nixon ultimately vindicated by the disclosures, several of them also pointed out that he must support his new openness with documentation if he expects to restore his shattered credibility.

"He is beginning to make some progress but the only way his credibility can be restored—if it can be—is to completely document everything he says and hope that the Documentation supports what he has been saying publicly," said Gov. William G. Milliken of Michigan.

"Even then, it is going to be very difficult."

Evans said he believed the President's claim of innocence but thought that Mr. Nixon could recover only through "full, free and prompt disclosure."

"If that full disclosure is damning then all I've said doesn't hold, but I don't think that is the case," Evans said.

The governors applauded Gallup for his analysis but most of them said they thought that Republicans could survive in state elections next year if they nominated good candidates.

Gov. Linwood Holton of Virginia, outgoing chairman of the Republican Governors Association, main-

tained that Watergate had no effect on the Nov. 6 elections in Virginia in which Mills E. Godwin, a Democrat turned Republican, narrowly defeated liberal independent Henry Howell. The election cost Republicans five of their 25 seats in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Watergate was an excuse rather than the reason for the legislative losses, said Holton, who disputed suggestions by GOP officials that Watergate was a major factor in the legislative losses in Northern Virginia.

The Virginia governor is reportedly under consideration for a Cabinet or other high-level administration job, and he was noticeably less critical than many of his colleagues about the President's efforts to clear himself of scandal charges.

Holton, like many other of the governors, had said before the meeting that he didn't think any resolution should be passed either commending or criticizing the President on Watergate. But when the subject came up, governors agreed that omission of a Watergate statement would appear to be a slap in the face of Mr. Nixon and would also reflect discreditably upon the governors.

"I don't think we're anticipating the press right," said California Gov. Ronald Reagan. "If we go out of here without saying anything, were going to deserve every damn thing we get in 1974."

Iowa Gov. Robert D. Ray said that Watergate must be included in the resolution on the President because "Watergate overshadows everything he's done."