

WXPost Nixon Ouster Talk Gets New Impetus

A GOP Line of Succession

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The swearing-in of Vice President Gerald R. Ford, putting a Republican next in line of succession once again, has spurred more talk on Capitol Hill about the possibility of the impeachment or resignation of President Nixon.

So far it is all words and no action. But the sentiment in Congress reflects a clear awareness that Ford's occupancy of the vice presidency provides an important new incentive, for politically concerned Republicans particularly, who would like to see Mr. Nixon go.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield said yesterday that his Democratic colleagues "aren't putting any

pressure on me" to try to force Mr. Nixon out. And Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott, asked whether he expected the Ford confirmation would increase pressure for the President to quit, replied: "No, I do not expect it. What I expect is more questions like that."

But others, usually preferring anonymity on the touchy subject, disagreed. "It makes impeachment thinkable," one Republican congressman close to Ford said. "It really hasn't been an acceptable alternative to Republican congressmen up to now."

And a conservative Republican put it even more strongly and directly. "Nine-
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ty days," he said. "Ninety days—Jerry will be President in 90 days."

Nixon loyalists like Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.) and Rep. John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) said they saw no movement whatever to have fellow Republicans put heat on Mr. Nixon now that succession to the presidency is safely in GOP hands, after nearly two months with Speaker of the House Carl Albert constitutionally next in line.

But the sentiment that Ford's confirmation did make a difference was heard in both houses. The first vocal evidence of it came Wednesday when Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) said Ford's confirmation produced "a new situation concerning any call on the President to resign in the interest of the country." He and others, he said, would have to "give every thoughtful consideration to that possibility."

Javits, a liberal Republican whose call on Mr. Nixon to resign predictably would carry little weight at the White House, conceded that he knew of no other Republican leader or group of Republicans ready to go to the President to ask him to quit. But others did say they agreed with him that the Ford confirmation did give them a new element in the

equation to think about.

"Javits spoke for an awful lot of senators, and not just liberal senators either," one fellow Republican senator said. "Nobody's giving him a hard time for saying it

today. And it cuts across ideological lines."

There are those, like Republican National Chairman George Bush, who contend that Ford in the vice presidency lends stability to the whole situation, as a new and credible voice in the administration.

But Bush acknowledged also that the next few weeks, when members of Congress go home for the Christmas holidays and take soundings among their constituents, could be a critical turning point. If they come back with their ears ringing for the President's removal, the presence of Ford in the vice presidency would make pressure on Mr. Nixon easier to apply.

Some influential Republican senators already have been taking those soundings and are chagrined at what they bode for their party and for themselves in 1974.

Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), while agreeing with Bush that Ford could help the President restore credibility in the administration, was candid in his assessment of what the President's Watergate and related problems are doing to Republican candidates

around the country.

"If it ever bottoms out we might be all right," he said, "but the coconuts keep dropping. You have to wear a steel helmet around here." Dole, who is up for re-election next year, said he has been back to Kansas politicking 43 times this year. "You've got to go out there that much just to keep even," he said.

Dole and others expressed the view that the pressure on Mr. Nixon is likely to mount as the 1974 elections approach and the polls and their own soundings still show the Republicans to be in great trouble.

"If the President is not involved in any of these (Watergate) shenanigans and some seats are lost," Dole said, "we can live with it. But if some of us lose because of some of these other characters (involved in Watergate), that will be hard to take."

It is this approaching political reality, many Republicans on the Hill agreed, that is likely to apply pressure to Mr. Nixon more than an overt push by a group of GOP leaders to get him to resign.

At the same time, though, they said the President probably can't stand another shock to the public like the firing of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and the consequent resignation of Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson on Oct. 20, which spawned galloping talk of impeachment, or the disclosure that 18¼ minutes of a key Watergate tape was erased.

"I think if there are any more jolts they will be fatal," Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.) said. "But I think there also could be an eroding process over a period of time that could have the same effect. I've made clear I feel we need full disclosure from the President."

The news that the White House tape of June 20, 1972, had the 18¼-minute gap was cited by several Republicans on the Hill as a death blow to the President's attempt to restore candor, and hence a factor in the increasing climate of expectation about eventual impeachment or resignation.

"Until this latest 18-minute thing on the tapes," one Midwestern Republican senator said, "there was a lot of

hope. But that's gone now. Mail had been turning favorable to the President and now it's running against him, 2 to 1 calling for impeachment or resignation."

This Republican also cited the announced departures of Melvin R. Laird and Bryce Harlow as White House advisers as particularly demoralizing to GOP legislators. "It's disturbing," he said. "It kind of leaves the President without any member of his staff who can work with the Congress."

While no single Republican really influential within the White House has indicated the time has come for the President to step down, there is a consensus already on which one Republican likely would carry the most weight in such a message: Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

But so far Goldwater, who is in Iran inspecting military and oil installations, has held fast to the view that there is no reason for either impeachment or resignation until proof is presented that the President did something wrong.

Accumulation and evaluation of that evidence is the task of the House Judiciary Committee, whose inquiry into the possibility of impeachment has lagged and become the focus of much criticism and partisan bickering.

The committee has been occupied with the Ford confirmation and the collection of a staff for the impeachment inquiry. According to the office of Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.), a special counsel is to be appointed by Christmas. Numerous House members of both parties have called for expedited proceedings, both in the public interest and for the sake of the beleaguered President.

Rep. Thomas F. Railsback (R-Ill.), a member of the committee, said the swearing-in of Ford clearly fore-
... a more concerted effort to impeach by the Democrats." But some Republicans, too, will feel freer to seek impeachment, he said. "Some Republicans feel President Nixon's resignation or impeachment and conviction doesn't necessarily carry the same tragic import that it would have if Jerry Ford were not there."

he said.

Railsback said he believes the President, as a man re-elected overwhelmingly last year, has every right to resist pressures that he step aside voluntarily. Resignation should be a personal choice, he said, "even if it might benefit and the party might benefit. I think if I was President and elected by 60 per cent of the vote and I was innocent, I wouldn't resign and I'd fight impeachment."

In all the talk on the Hill about impeachment and resignation, there is a considerable amount of party buck-passing over who should administer the telling blow to the President.

Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), the majority whip, said he considers the President's dilemma "a matter that will have to be determined by members of the President's own party. The President certainly is not going to yield to any pressure from the Democrats."

But Rep. Barber B. Conable Jr., chairman of the House Republican Research Committee, said that Democrats are calling on Republicans to get rid of the President "because they're not willing to do it themselves." They are ambivalent on the question, he said, wanting Mr. Nixon out and at the same time wanting the political advantage that his beleaguered presidency may bring them.

One key Republican senator said, "I would expect that after a period of time after confirmation, people will be looking to see if the President will do anything voluntarily. Maybe that's wishful thinking."

For the time being, the Republicans on Capitol Hill appear prepared to let the matter of the President's future unfold without any interference from them. But there is plenty of stock-taking going on, and the advent of Vice President Ford clearly adds an important new element to the political equation.