

# A Watershed for Nixon

## Some Republicans in Congress Hope Ford Will Soon Be the 38th President

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 6—Now that Gerald R. Ford has become the nation's 40th Vice President, a number of Republicans in Congress hope that he will soon become the 38th President.

They expect and desire the resignation of President Nixon.

**News Analysis** His resignation would relieve them of the need to face up to an eventual vote on his impeachment.

But if Mr. Nixon does not step down voluntarily by next spring or somehow restore widespread public confidence in his Administration, some of Mr. Ford's old colleagues in the House of Representatives are likely to join in any impeachment move against the President.

The reason, outlined privately in the last few days by typical Republicans, is a basic one: Their own political future is at stake.

"You'd like him to resign, wouldn't you?" a senior Democrat said tauntingly to a Republican colleague in the Speaker's lobby just off the House floor. "The President's an albatross around your neck."

"At least that," the Republican replied.

Similar conversations have become increasingly commonplace as Congress, resolving the issue of Presidential succession, has begun to focus on the question of Presidential conduct. Republicans, though a minority in Congress, are central to any determination of Mr. Nixon's fate. A month ago, they were demanding a verdict on Mr. Ford's nomination. Now, they

Continued on Page 27, Column 5

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

are pushing for swift judgment as of whether there are grounds for impeaching Mr. Nixon.

Thus, the elevation today of Mr. Ford, from House Republican leader to Vice President, may prove to be a watershed in the Nixon Presidency. It provides a successor, certified as honest by investigations in the Senate and House. It suggests continuity, because of Mr. Ford's compatibility with Mr. Nixon on national issues.

More than that, it represents escape — Democrats from the prospect of being accused of partisanship if they moved to impeach the President while a Democrat, House Speaker Carl Albert, was next in line of succession, and Republicans from an elementary fear of defeat in the 1974 elections.

In public, Republican spokesmen exude confidence that Mr. Nixon's Watergate afflictions will not be contagious in the 34 Senate and 435 House campaigns to be conducted next year.

"Campaigns don't rise or fall too often any more on what's happening in Washington," said Senator William E. Brock 3d of Tennessee, the chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee.

In private, though, Republicans designing a strategy for the 1974 elections predict disaster—a net loss of five of the 43 seats they now have in the Senate and as many as 75 of the 191 seats they have in the House—if Mr. Nixon is still President and still beleaguered next Nov. 7.

"There is a point beyond

which we can't be asked to go" out of loyalty to a Republican President, one Republican campaign official said. "A party only serves as a vehicle for good government."

According to Senator Jacob K. Javits, the New York Republican who faces re-election next year, the President's resignation "will properly come to the front" with the confirmation of Mr. Ford.

In the Capitol cloakrooms, there is a widespread belief that, as one Republican put it, "the President will not be President at the time of the next election."

To a large extent, the wish is father to the thought. Mr. Nixon has said several times recently that he will not "walk away" from the job to which he was elected. Even so, his fellow Republicans say "the odds are increasing geometrically that there is going to be a resignation." The belief is so common that there is frequent speculation that a President Ford would select Melvin R. Laird—the departing White House counselor who once was Mr. Ford's Republican whip in the House—as his nominee for Vice President.

### Campaign Issue Seen

At the root of the desire for a Presidential abdication—"if we had that early resignation," said a Republican campaign

consultant, "and those responsible began to put the Administration back together, we could have some election upsets"—is concern over the possibility of a roll-call vote on impeachment in the midst of a Congressional campaign.

The House Judiciary Committee is not expected to produce

a report on its impeachment inquiry before next spring, when many members of Congress will be engaged in primary campaigns. A vote on a resolution of impeachment by an incumbent Representative would undoubtedly become a campaign issue.

No one among those members of Congress and campaign aides consulted this week would suggest that an impeachment vote would be based solely on political considerations. But there was general recognition that the attitude of Congressional constituents would at least be a factor in the equation.

One member of the House Republican leadership complained that the Democrats "want to drag it out"—the impeachment inquiry—until October and said that he hoped Mr. Ford's confirmation would "speed up the whole proceedings" to minimize the political effect.

The problem, in the view of House Republicans, is that Congressmen seeking to demonstrate their own distaste for Watergate and to dissociate themselves from the President would find the impeachment vote to be "a handy vehicle, a method of showing one's independence."