



Make-or-Break Test for Nixon

Joseph Alsop

AT ABOUT the time when the President made public the data on his financial affairs and taxes, his chief aide, General Alexander Haig, had a revealing encounter on Capitol Hill. The general was the guest of the Senate's Republican Conference. There was a large turn-out, and the Senators were grimly forthright.

Besides Senate minority leader Hugh D. Scott of Pennsylvania, the most insistently articulate were two conservatives, Senators Henry L. Bellmon of Oklahoma and John G. Tower of Texas. All three harped on the crucial importance of the President achieving what is currently called "full disclosure" before the congressional recess on December 21.

★ ★ ★

HAIG APOLOGIZED for the delay in putting out the documents concerning the President's financial and tax problems. He said it was occasioned by the complexity of these problems, plus the need to be unchallengeably accurate. Senator Scott replied that any delay was unfortunate; and that all the problems, like the milk people's political contributions, the ITT matter, and so on, must be covered with equal minuteness.

With support from Senators Tower and Bellmon, Senator Scott further insisted that the famous tapes, or at least those portions of them bearing on Watergate, must be included in the published material.

In a rather less blunt way, the House Republican leaders have stressed the same points. All this has a much deeper

meaning, too. The truth is that the congressional leaders of the President's own party want "the people in the drugstores" — Senator Scott's phrase — to have all the facts in their hands before the Senators and Representatives go home for Christmas.

The Christmas congressional recess will continue for about a month. It will be the last chance Senators and Representatives get until late spring, to make a methodical test of grassroots feelings about the President and his troubles. And that probably will be the make-or-break test for Richard M. Nixon.

The point here is simple. President Nixon can hardly continue to govern, if he is utterly deserted by the members of his own party in Congress.

★ ★ ★

EVERYTHING will depend, however, on what the Republican—and also Democratic — Senators and Representatives find "the people in the drugstores" saying when they get home. There has been no time in living memory when you find so many members of Congress preparing for such methodical, intense and elaborate investigation of grass roots sentiment.

Senator Scott and other leaders are extra eager for "full disclosure," in turn, so that grass roots sentiment can be formed on the basis of the best fact available. If the result is strong sentiment for impeachment, impeachment will then become downright probable. If there is strong feeling that the President has been harassed enough, harassment will rapidly diminish.