

Republican Strategists See Major 1974

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON
Special to The New York Times

TIMES, MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1973

Election Losses for G.O.P.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16—Republican campaign planners are beginning to compare 1974 with 1958, when the G.O.P. suffered losses of 13 Senate seats, 47 House seats and five governorships.

Like 1958, 1974 falls in the middle of a President's second term—historically a bad year for the party in the White House, as it was for the Democrats and President Johnson in 1966. Many forecasts see 1974 as a recession year, as 1958 was, with rising unemployment.

In addition, there is the Watergate burden on Republican candidates next year. Watergate was never mentioned when President Nixon talked campaign strategy with Republican leaders last week. George Bush, the chairman of the Republican National Committee, still predicts that the White House scandals will not hurt party candidates next year. But almost every other politician here disagrees, including the campaign specialists on Mr. Bush's staff.

"Sure Watergate's a factor," said a Republican consultant to Congressional candidates. "Any politician in the Republican party who would gainsay it is blind or stupid or both."

'Most Incredible'

Senator Bill Brock of Tennessee, chairman of the Senate Republican campaign committee, said last week that Watergate was a "pervasive issue" in the coming campaign, one that had "severely wounded" the Republicans.

Watergate also handicaps Republicans' statehouse prospects, discouraging candidates from running and diminishing the chances of those who do, according to another Republican analyst. He asserted that the silence on Watergate in the White House at last Tuesday's planning session was "the most incredible thing I've ever heard in my life. Of course it hurts."

Predictions about 1974 are mostly guesswork but significantly, several independent Republican and Democratic guesses point toward Democrat gains of perhaps 25 House seats, as many as five or six Senate seats and four or five governorships. Democrats would not need gains as dramatic as those in 1958 to end up stronger than they did then. For they have 62 out of 100 votes in the Senate, 243 of the 435 votes in the House and 32 of the 50 governorships.

In the 34 Senate races next year, the Republican vulnerability begins in states where incumbents do not stand for reelection. Even before their candidates are chosen, Democrats are granted an even chance of succeeding Norris Cotton of New Hampshire and Wallace Bennett of Utah, Republicans who have announced their retirement.

Senator William Saxbe of Ohio, who had planned to retire will leave the Senate as soon as he is confirmed as Attorney General. A Democrat, yet to be chosen by Ohio's Gov. John J. Gilligan, will get the Saxbe seat and will hope to keep it in next year's election.

If Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona decides not to run again, Representative Morris Udall, a Democrat, would be favored to win the seat. Gov. Thomas Salmon of Vermont, a Democrat, is considered a strong Senate candidate if George Aiken retires — and perhaps even if Senator Aiken decides to run. Senator Marlow Cook, Republican of Kentucky, is considered vulnerable—and eager to retire—in the face of a resurgent Democratic party in his state.

Wants to Run

Senator Milton Young of North Dakota may be an exception to the rule that Republican retirements make Democratic opportunities: Republican officials say that the only way to save that seat from former Gov. William Guy, a Democrat, is to persuade Senator Young to step aside and let Representative Mark Andrews run in his place. Senator Young, however, wants to run himself.

Other Republicans considered to be in jeopardy are Senators Robert Dole of Kansas, Peter Dominick of Colorado and Edward Gurney of Florida.

The hope of Republican gains, meanwhile, begins in

states where Democrats are retiring. Former Gov. Paul Laxalt, a Republican, is rated a formidable candidate in Nevada, where Senator Alan Bible, a Democrat, will step down. Representative Wilmer Mizell, the one-time pitching star with baseball's St. Louis Cardinals, would have his best chance for the Senate if Senator Sam Ervin Jr. does not run.

Hickel and Gravel

The strongest potential challenge to a Democratic incumbent is considered to be from Walter J. Hickel, the former Alaska Governor and Interior Secretary early in the Nixon Administration, against Senator Mike Gravel. The next-best Republican opportunities are rated long shots at this point:

Against Democratic Senators Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, Birch Bayh of Indiana, and Warren Magnuson of Washington. John Danforth, Missouri's attorney general and reputedly the Republicans' strongest candidate against Senator Thomas Eagleton, is said to have been discouraged from running by the Watergate mood.

Representative Robert Michel of Illinois, chairman of the House Republican campaign committee, volunteered last week at the White House that "maybe a comparable year" to 1974 for his party's House representation was the cataclysmic 1958. The loss of 45 seats or more—possibility in some Republican estimates—would reduce Republicans to

less than a third of the House membership.

By all accounts, Watergate is a big part of the Republican problem. "In its simplest and most devastating form, it could force every candidate in the House to take a position for or against the President," said one widely consulted Republican source. "I don't know what we'll tell Republican candidates next year," he said. "If the election were next week I'd tell our guys to run like hell and get as far away from the President as you can."

In 35 governors' races around the country next year, Republicans say they want to "break even" at their current level of 18 governorships "or pick up a couple, at best." They also see the chance of a net loss—

and, more important, of losing their last big-state governorships in California, New York, Michigan and Massachusetts. At the start of the Nixon Administration, Republicans held the governor's offices in eight of the 10 largest states.

Democrats are concerned about Republican designs on several states: Maine, where two-term Gov. Kenneth Curtis cannot run again; Georgia, especially if the former Governor, Lester Maddox wins the Democratic nomination; South Dakota unless Gov. Richard Kneip, a Democrat, persuades the court that he is permitted to run for a third term; Oklahoma, where Gov. David Hall will have to run against charges of scandal in his Democratic administration; and Alaska, where Mr.

Hickel could choose to run for his old Governor's office again.

The Democrats are confident of their chances in New Hampshire, against ultra-conservative Gov. Meldrim Thomson, in Connecticut, against Gov. Thomas Meskill; in Tennessee, where Gov. Winfield Dunn cannot run for a second term; in Colorado, where John Love left the Governor's office and became briefly an energy czar in the Nixon Administration. John Vanderhoof, Mr. Love's successor, may face a struggle for next year's Republican nomination. The Democrats are also confident about Arizona, where Gov. Jack Williams, a conservative Republican, is not running for reelection.

REMEMBER THE NEEDIEST!