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Who'll Tell Mr. Nixon?

These days, when you see a huddle of unhappy-looking House or Senate Republicans, you can be pretty sure they are discussing the question, "Who will bell the cat?" The cat is Richard M. Nixon, and belling the cat means telling the President he must resign his office for the good of his party.

The reason is bleakly simple. The news reaching Capitol Hill from the states and congressional districts is downright horrendous. The Watergate-engendered loss of confidence in the President is said, at least by some, to be creating a situation like that in 1930. In that year, the great Depression and Herbert Hoover's unpopularity produced a record massacre of Republican senators and congressmen.

In 1930, however, the party was far better off on Capitol Hill, with an actual majority in the House of Representatives, for instance. Today, in contrast, the count of the House is 240 Democrats; 192 Republicans; one Independent and two vacancies. And the Senate count is again 56 to 44—including two Conservative-Independents with the Republican minority.

Imagine, then, what the Republican plight will be, if another 40 to 50 Republican seats are lost in the House and another 5 to 10 Senate seats are also transferred to Democrats. That sort of result could make the House ratio close to two and one half to one in favor of the Democrats, and the Senate ratio would be nearly as bad. Yet these are literally the kind of figures that leading House and Senate Republicans now talk about, when they let their hair down.

The case of the Senate is more manageable for analysis, and thus serves

as a better illustration. In this particular off-year, the Republicans ought to have a slight advantage, since they have only 15 seats to hang onto, whereas the Democrats have 19. In fact, however, the Democrats have almost no possibly endangered Senate seats, whereas the Republicans have remarkably few sure bets.

You have to begin the Republican danger-list with the seats of three men who are surely leaving the Senate, plus one who is likely to do so. The three sure leavers are Wallace Bennett of Utah, Norris Cotton of New Hampshire and William Saxbe of Ohio. The likely leaver is Marlow Cook of Kentucky. But you must then add several other seats, like that of Milton Young of North Dakota, where the outlook is already extremely dark, and some further states where there could be bad trouble, like Vermont if Sen. George Aiken joins the other leavers.

There are plenty of open signs, too, that Watergate is the main source of the Republicans' problem. In Illinois, for example, Rep. John B. Anderson was thinking seriously of trying for the Senate seat. When he decided not to, he openly said that Watergate would make the race too tough.

Such are the current Republican analyses, "unless someone screws up enough courage to tell the President he ought to get the hell out." The quotation is from a high ruggedly partisan Republican figure. He added sadly that President Nixon was unlikely to hear the blunt truth, because "there's something about the awesomeness of that oval room in the White House."

The worst of it is, moreover, that most states and congressional districts

are only just beginning to feel the grim pinch of the energy crisis—which may hurt the President as much as Watergate. Even if you leave that worry out, however, it is clear that Republican senators and congressmen are going to hear dreadful news, when they go home in the recess to find out how their people are thinking.

The polls are beginning to say this, with emphasis. The Gallup organization took its most recent poll on whether the President should be "impeached or compelled to leave his office." Any sensible man is bound to recoil from the national paralysis that would inevitably result from a long impeachment-procedure; so the Gallup Poll found a majority against impeachment. But the Harris Poll asked a more down-to-earth question, and found a majority of 41 to 35 in favor of the President's voluntary resignation.

The real crunch will most probably come, in consequence, when the recess is over. Assuming the President makes no near-miraculous political recovery, the great majority of Republicans running for re-election will then be frantic for the President's resignation. The leaders in House and Senate will be under heavy pressure to forget "the awesomeness of the oval room," and to warn the President he must resign.

In any case, the President can count on little support from his own party hereafter, for those Republicans in no danger at the next election are conspicuously the ones, like Sens. Jacob Javits of New York and Charles Mathias of Maryland, who have been rather consistently anti-Nixon. So what will Richard M. Nixon do? It is an interesting question.

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