



ERNEST B. FURGURSON

Congressmen's Home Soundings Won't Change Nixon Stance

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress are going to start straggling back from their districts next week, and you will find the ones who thought Mr. Nixon was a great patriot when they departed will report when they return that their constituents would be outraged by presidential resignation or impeachment proceedings. The ones who left thinking he should be thrown out are going to come back thinking he should be thrown out.

And that is going to leave the question right where it was then, and where the hard responsibility must lie. That is in the House Judiciary Committee, which eventually has to vote on whether formal impeachment proceedings will ensue.

No amount of wishful thinking by the president's loyal supporters is going to puff away the mass of evidence against him. But neither is any volume of high-powered commentary in the media going to convince Mr. Nixon that he should resign voluntarily.

Nothing is.

THE DREAMERS who imagine that a delegation of Republican congressmen will one day call at the White House and entreat the president to step down for the sake of his party and their election chances this fall are just that, dreamers. Not for imagining the visit, but for imagining that Mr. Nixon might respond to it.

There is no evidence in his long political career that the Republican Party or the Republican percentage in Congress ever mattered one iota to him — except as fields where he could sow IOUs to blossom later, when he needed them most for his presidential ambitions. This was emphatically re proven in his 1972 campaign, when his celebrated CREEP organization soaked up every dollar in sight for the exclusive purpose of reelecting a man whose re-election was all but certain, and shrugged at the fate of other, deserving Republicans who desperately needed campaign money.

Nor is there any backing at all for the idea that he might be stricken by belated conscience and concern for the country's near future, and step aside in favor of Gerald Ford. The only response to that one is to chuckle, humorlessly.

REPEATEDLY, DESPITE this background, new rumors pass from one end of Pennsylvania Avenue to the other, that the president's mood is darker and it is

only a matter of time before he formulates a way to get out with the appearance of innocence. Or anyhow, without being thrown out.

Obviously, it is too late for that. It is impossible now for him to depart without the worldwide assumption that he is pleading guilty by doing so.

Yet there is one aspect of the whole long scandal that keeps open the remote chance of his leaving, under the pretext of illness or otherwise. That is the depressing fact, for him, that the disclosures are nowhere near ended. There is much more to come.

The group that seems to appreciate this nearly as much as the president himself is his loyalists — not the ones who allege his virginity, and run expensive newspaper ads with quotations like:

"A small group of radicals and radical-liberals have whipped up a nationwide hysteria to the point that good citizens favor impeaching the president even before it has been proved that he has actually violated any law."

Anyone who underwrites that view is far out of touch, both with what has been going on and with the definition of impeachment — which is the process of proving or disproving an official's guilt.

The loyalists I speak of are more sophisticated than that. They are the ones who say mentally, let's get on with impeachment if we must, if only to prove that the president is innocent. But let's set a deadline by which the House must act, and if no impeachment has been approved by then, let's put it all behind us.

THAT WOULD RULE OUT the slow but necessary uncovering of further evidence, step by step, in orderly procedure. If the greatest outrage of all should come to light the day after the deadline, it would be moot. That would serve Mr. Nixon well, but not the country.

The House committee should — must — proceed ruthlessly but carefully to drag out every remaining crumb of evidence. If at some point in that process the Republican members thereof should go to the White House and tell the president just what he would have to face in formal impeachment proceedings, perhaps then Mr. Nixon would quit "voluntarily" for the good of party and country. But not until then.