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A Severe Political Blow...

The strange business of the erased White House tape may not be the last nail in the President's political coffin. But in the mild language of the new Republican leader of the House, Rep. John Rhodes of Arizona, "it certainly isn't going to help."

There are other developments in the wind that are not going to help, either. For example, a friendly warning has now been passed to the President by influential members of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation. The warning was that he really must "get his tax problems solved" before the committee goes to work in earnest.

This committee was chosen by the President as the one most likely to be favorable to him. Yet on the evidence disclosed by the President himself, leading committee members more and more lean to the view that there was no justification for the large tax deduction taken for the Nixon vice presidential papers. The view is based on the technicality that the gift of the papers was not "completed" prior to the cut-off date for gifts of this type.

Unfortunately, the technicality is very much part of the law; and a gift that was not "completed" until after the 1969 cut-off date is undoubtedly non-deductible. If the President heeds the warning, therefore, he will have to make a horribly unpleasant choice. Either he must admit error and belatedly pay the resulting taxes and penalties. Or he must simply hope against hope for a different kind of committee report, despite the intimation that an unfavorable report is a serious likelihood.

To make this matter worse, the Joint Committee is expected to complete its work as late as April. So a report that the President has failed to pay a very large sum owed to the Internal Revenue Service—if this is indeed the out-

come—will almost exactly coincide with the payments of painful sums to the IRS by just about all the voters in the country.

It now seems to be the rule, in truth, that each great trouble encountered by the President is hardly out of the way, before another trouble, equally great, crops up to make new headlines. Meanwhile, another dangerous aspect of Richard M. Nixon's political situation is now beyond any reasonable possibility of doubt. In brief, the President can no longer count on real aid or support from the majority of Republicans in the House and Senate.

Representative Rhodes, for instance, spoke at a fund-raising dinner for a fellow Republican in Pennsylvania over the week-end. This was prior to the hammer-blow of the erased tape, and the House Republican leader is one of the more old-fashioned partisans in Congress. Yet Rhodes spoke of Republicans running in this year's congressional election as members of a "new coalition" having no special link with the President. According to the Philadelphia Bulletin, Representative Rhodes continued:

"Republican congressmen and senators didn't get any help from Mr. Nixon in 1972, and they will be conducting their own campaigns in 1974."

For any practical politician, such a statement, coming from such a source, is a signal that can be read across a continent. It means that in Congress, the aim of most Republican members will be to put the maximum amount of space between themselves and the White House. Hence it is even clear that at least one or two Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee are thinking about casting favorable votes for a bill of impeachment.

Here, of course, is another dreadful hurdle that is looming higher and

higher before the President. In sharp contrast to the Senate Watergate Committee's Sam Dash, the Judiciary Committee's majority counsel, John Doar, is plainly going to conduct a most sober inquiry. He has firmly cut off himself and his staff from any kind of public contact, for instance. But in the present poisonous atmosphere, it is doubtful whether the Judiciary Committee would heed John Doar, even if he advised strongly against a pro-impeachment vote. The best nose-counters have in fact concluded that a majority of the committee already wants to vote a bill of impeachment. The White House has been so advised. How the whole House will vote, if

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and when a bill of impeachment is brought before it, is certainly a much more open question. The point, here, is that a great many members of the electorate understandably have a genuine horror of the whole impeachment procedure. Moreover, these people who hate the idea of impeachment include large numbers of those who would be both pleased and relieved by the President's voluntary resignation.

The truth seems to be that a majority of the voters would much like the President to resign, whereas nothing like a grass roots pro-impeachment majority has emerged as yet. The dilemma for the House is obvious.

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WXPPost

George F. Will

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End of the Nixon Administration?

Thanks to those electronics experts who analyzed Mr. Nixon's doctored tape—the one with the 18-minute erasure—the end of the Nixon administration is predictable.

The unanimous report by the experts should give an irresistible momentum to the drive for impeachment. The report told us the essential facts about the tape, and enables us to infer crucial things about Mr. Nixon's White House.

It is appropriate and useful that the fatal blow came in a dry-as-dust technical report, utterly lacking political coloration.

Mr. Nixon's men have tried to portray his continuing Watergate troubles

is this: the repeated manual erasures could not have been an accident.

We know the erasure happened after 1 p.m. October 1, when the machine that did the erasing arrived new at the White House. The White House itself says that from October 1, only Mr. Nixon and four close aides had access to the tapes.

The White House now urges Americans not to jump to conclusions about this. But the inescapable conclusion jumps at Americans.

It is that sometime on or after October 1 someone at or near the top of the White House, someone among five people with access to the tapes, destroyed subpoenaed evidence. This was another crime on behalf of a continuing cover-up.

This dictates a second common sense conclusion: whoever did this did it because he or she—or they—believed that it was better to commit the crime than to let Judge John Sirica hear what Mr. Nixon and Mr. Haldeman said about Watergate just three days after the break-in.

Because these conclusions are so inescapable, the Watergate drama has moved into a deadly third stage.

The first was the "presumption of innocence" stage. At that point the question was: Is there any reason to believe that Mr. Nixon was involved in the Watergate coverup?

But soon the rush of events worked an ineluctable change, bringing on the "White Queen" stage. The Queen, you may recall, bragged to Alice in Wonderland that she could believe six impossible things before breakfast. In the "White Queen" stage the ques-

tion became: What are all the difficult things you must believe in order to believe Mr. Nixon is innocent?

At first one just had to believe that Mr. Nixon ran the most slipshod White House imaginable. Some of his employees and some of his campaign funds got involved in a "third rate burglary."

Later you had to believe that Mr. Nixon was kept in the dark and then lied to by his most trusted aides, including two of his few close personal friends, Mr. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.

Then you had to believe that Mr. Nixon was refusing to release the tapes because he cared more about an abstract principle (presidential confidentiality) than about clearing his name and sparing the nation further Watergate trauma.

But now, thanks to six anonymous electronics experts, we know too much. We know that there is corruption in the precincts of the Oval Office.

And, of course, we really know more than that.

We know who was operating in and around the White House when the cover-up began 19 months ago. And we know that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, Dean, Strachan, Porter, Caulfield, Ulasewicz, Mitchell, Stans, Hunt, Mardian, Segretti, Liddy, Kalmbach, McCord, Chapin, Gray and Magruder are gone now.

So now we are in the impeachment stage, and the question is: Of all the significant men who were around the White House when the cover-up began, who is still there providing the continuity in this on-going cover-up?

One name springs to mind.

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as the work of inflamed Democratic partisans. But no political enemy has said anything as damning as was said by the electronics experts.

The erased conversation was between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, his chief-of-staff, three days after the Watergate break-in. The experts identified the precise machine on which the tape was erased. They demonstrated that someone erased the tape by hand, using the machine's keyboard controls. This "someone" erased it piece-by-piece, in at least five, and probably nine efforts.

The experts scrupulously refrained from drawing any conclusion. But the grinding logic of their demonstration