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Congress finds voters confused

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This is a winter of voters' discontent.

Many have been spilling their outrage, worry and confusion into interviews and letters to their congressmen.

"Is the energy crisis real?" asks a young architect from San Mateo who car pools to San Francisco. "Or is it a big rip-off by the oil companies?"

Another constituent offers this urgent advice to Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-South San Francisco):

"Forget about Watergate. For God's sake do something about crime! You cannot believe how bad things are. It's like living in a jungle. My wife's car was hit by sniper fire not long ago — no, not in Vietnam, on the Bayshore Freeway."

California congressmen headed back to Washington this weekend. Their winter recess is over, and tomorrow they may begin what may be known as the impeachment session.

But as the distraught husband's plea indicated, only a minority of voters are demanding that President Nixon be impeached.

Yet Congressmen in this and other states found that a large majority would just as soon see Nixon step down. Painlessly.

In San Francisco, Rep. Phillip Burton senses "a deep and abiding concern about the economy."

He notes the numbing impact of inflation on pensioners and others with fixed in-

comes, while wage earners worry about the increasing unemployment. The Democratic lawmaker added: "They've had enough of Republicans for a while."

Marin commuters bombarded the office of retiring Republican Congressman William S. Mailliard with complaints about dry gasoline pumps. As one citizen in San Rafael put it: "How can I get to work if I'm limited to 15 gallons a week?"

A 29 year old voter in Pleasanton tossed this question at Rep. Fortney H. Stark Jr. (D-Oakland): "How is it that President Nixon, Governor Reagan and Mayor Alioto combined paid less income tax than I did last year?"

"Is my gas going to be cut off and am I going to lose my job? If so, who will pay the cost of supporting my family? It is certain that Nixon, Reagan and Alioto won't."

In Alameda, R. I. Bowler, too, wonders how real the energy crisis is. He says

that even if Nixon were not responsible for the crunch, "How could he possibly solve the problem when he has accepted huge — and in many cases illegal — contributions from oil interests?"

Troubled citizens in the Midwest, East and South gave their Congressmen similar messages to carry back to Washington. Knight News Service reporters who accompanied Republican Congressmen on their rounds learned that use of the ultimate weapon of impeachment against a President still seems too fearsome to the American people.

Yet that fear could dissolve at any moment for Nixon is on the brink of losing the last shred of support among the people, their report concludes.

While Watergate no longer is the first-involved concern, it is far from forgotten. The long-running scandal has encouraged a clear majority to decide the fuel shortage has been contrived — that government in general and the

President in particular are to blame for everything that has gone wrong.

This view came across clearly the other day at the Fireside Restaurant in Manistique, on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where a group of Republicans gathered for breakfast with Congressman Philip E. Ruppe.

Outside it was 10 below zero, and at 7:30 it still was more than an hour before dawn.

Somebody cracked, "This is Nixon's version of the Dark Ages."

Ruppe winced but he had to join in the laughter.

One of the Michigan congressman's best Republican campaign workers told him:

"We want Watergate laid to rest because it's souring everything. I mean, like the energy shortage. No one believes it's real."

"C'mon, Phil, what do you think really happened at Watergate?"