

O'Neill, Others Ask Nixon Resignation

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House Majority Leader

Thomas P. O'Neill (D-Mass.) and several other leading House Democrats urged President Nixon yesterday to resign now to help restore confidence in government.

But House Republicans and some conservative Democrats opposed this course as setting a bad precedent and as an easy way out for members wishing to duck a tough vote on impeaching the President for Watergate or other matters. A House vote on impeachment, the first step in attempting to remove a President from office, is expected in the House about the end of April.

Meanwhile, as the 93d Congress reconvened for its second session, a survey in the Senate, which would try the President should the House impeach (indict) him, showed that the top issues with the voters back home are the energy shortage and the weakening economy. Watergate is a distant third.

However, several senators said that public dissatisfaction with the administration's management of the energy and economy problems could further damage the President's chances of surviving impeachment.

O'Neill was not expressing a unanimous opinion. House Speaker Carl Albert said he "would have to wait a long time" before recommending that Mr. Nixon resign, and Majority Whip John McFall (D-Calif.) called such talk premature until the House Judiciary Committee completes its impeachment inquiry.

But O'Neill, the most outspoken of the House Democratic leader, told newsmen it would be "in the best interests of the nation" for Mr. Nixon to resign now. "He has lost the credibility of the country," said O'Neill. Referring to the new Vice President, O'Neill said, "I have confidence that Jerry Ford would give the country the stability and honesty that the country sorely needs and is looking for."

O'Neill declined to say how he would vote on impeachment, saying he considered himself sitting in the role of a grand juror to hear evidence. He predicted the outcome on the House floor would be very close.

Last year, leading House Democrats kept quiet on

Watergate and the President, figuring that Republicans were hurting themselves and Democrats should leave it

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alone. Now there is a growing Democratic call for resignation, led by O'Neill and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Wilbur D. Mills (Ark.).

It doesn't cost Democrats much to call for resignation of a Republican President. So far, the only Republican in Congress to urge resignation has been Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.).

Rep. John Anderson (R-Ill.), chairman of the House Republican conference, said some Republicans are privately talking resignation, "almost wistfully, as a solution that would have a less devastating effect" than an impeachment fight.

Nevertheless, Anderson said he believed the President would not and should not resign. "That is not the proper solution. We have a constitutional means (impeachment) to adjudicate the issue. Just because that is more difficult is no reason to fly in the face of the constitutional prescription."

But Rep. B. F. Sisk (D-Calif.), a leader of middle-road Democrats, said emphatically that Mr. Nixon should resign and added that if he did not do so, "I'm very close to voting to impeach. It seems impossible to believe that he is not involved in the Watergate cover-up and an obstruction of justice."

Said Sisk, "The temper of the people is that we desperately need to do something to restore confidence in government. It's at the lowest ebb I have ever seen."

Rep. Wayne Hays (D-Ohio), a powerful congressman who controls the size of members' staff allowances, and Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), third-ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, also said the President should resign for the good of the country.

But Rep. Silvio Conte (R-Mass.), a liberal Republican, called resignation "the easy way out" for House members. "This would take the whole load off our backs. We have the responsibility to make the decision. I don't think it's going to satisfy the country if he resigns. It would be another Agnew thing." Spiro T. Agnew resigned as Vice President last October and then pleaded no contest to one charge of tax evasion, thus avoiding a court trial.

Both Mills and O'Neill said they would sponsor legislation granting Mr. Nixon immunity from criminal prosecution if that were a requirement for his resignation.

In the Senate, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.) said Montanans are concerned about "energy, the economy, Watergate. As for impeachment, they didn't seem to want to discuss it much. I don't think they were too keen to face up to it."

Sen. J. Glenn Beall Jr. (R-Md.) said, "I heard more about energy than anything else. The additional Watergate tape disclosures shook people. People are becoming very disquieted."

Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.), seeking re-election in November, said "The cost of living, stability of the economy and energy are the vocal issues. But immediately beneath is the question of confidence in government—in other words, Watergate. The disclosures of the past week [about gaps in White House tapes] have been substantially damaging to the President's position."

Sen. Harry Flood Byrd Jr. (Ind.-Va.) said, "I think the economy is the No. 1 concern, and energy No. 2. People are less concerned about Watergate. The President's standing in the state is mixed—about the same as in recent months, but certainly he's lost compared with the 1972 election period when he got 68 per cent."

Sen. William L. Scott (R-Va.) said, "They're more concerned about energy than anything else, concerned about taxes and the high cost of living too. And obviously, people are concerned about the President, but I don't find the same concern as in the past."

Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.)—"Jobs, the energy crisis and obviously the conduct of the President. His standing is very, very low—20 per cent."

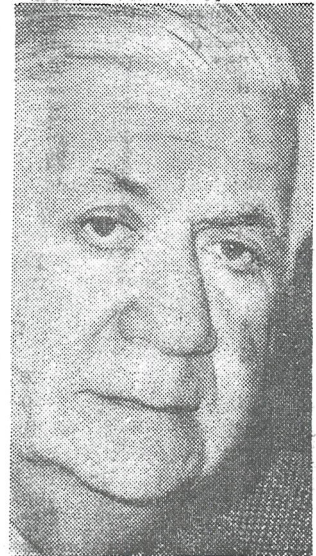
George McGovern (D-S.D.)—"Right now in our area the skyrocketing fuel price is the cutting edge of the No. 1 issue, which is inflation . . . The President? He's done for in South Dakota. They think he's betrayed his trust, they don't believe him, but they're nervous about impeachment, mainly because they don't understand the process. This last tape thing was another sledgehammer blow."

As the Senate opened the 1974 session yesterday, Howard M. Metzenbaum (D) was sworn in as senator from Ohio, replacing William B. Saxbe, who resigned Jan. 3 to become Attorney General.

Metzenbaum took the oath after the Senate, on a 53-to-22 vote, brushed aside a move by Carl Curtis (R-Neb.) to have the Rules Committee study a tax dispute between Metzenbaum and the Internal Revenue Service, which is now in court. Metzenbaum claimed deductions on a methane plant in Louisiana but the IRS disallowed them and billed him early this year for \$118,358 in back taxes.

Metzenbaum put the money in escrow, in effect, two days before he was appointed to the Senate, but is suing to reverse the IRS ruling. He said the deductions were made on advice of tax lawyers and accountants.

Washington area Sens. Beall and Scott voted for the Rules Committee study, Sen. Byrd voted against it, and Mathias did not vote.



REP. THOMAS O'NEILL

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