



# Watergate and the Mess in Washington

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**T**HE MOOD of the new session of Congress is as sour as swill. Creeping paralysis afflicts most departments of the Executive Branch. The White House itself is both Watergate-weakened and Watergate-obsessed.

Such is the real state of the government to which President Nixon addressed his message on the State of the Union. To an unprecedented degree, in fact, the state of the government is becoming the most important — and the most worrying — aspect of the State of the Union.

Since President Franklin Roosevelt gave the U.S. government a larger role in the lives of everyone, Washington has gone through some pretty bad patches. Some of them were as phoney as three-dollar bills.

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**T**HIS TIME, however, there is nothing phoney about the mess in Washington. Above all, there is nothing in the least phoney in the menace of this mess to the country and its future. In the year 1974, it is simply not safe for all of political Washington to behave as though this were still 1868 — which was the year of President Andrew Johnson's impeachment.

It is not economically safe, to begin with. The energy crisis, and the attendant enormous increase in crude oil costs, have brutally distorted and disturbed the national economies of most nations of the world. There are strong signs of the kind of international game of devil-take-the-hindmost that led us into the Great Depression of the '30s.

Maybe we are not again likely to see decent people hungrily scrabbling on mun-

icipal garbage dumps for the scraps of a meal as we did in 1932. Yet worldwide games of devil-take-the-hindmost always end by impoverishing everyone concerned. The U.S. cannot totally escape these consequences.

It almost makes matters worse that in this critical area of energy, the U.S. is potentially far, far better off than any other Western nation. By determined action, in a quite reasonable space of time, this country has the great good fortune of being able to recapture self-sufficiency in energy. But this week, the Congress proved — and for the second time in two months — that it cannot even pass a reasonable energy bill.

Despite the brilliance of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, moreover, our foreign affairs are just as full of menace as our economic affairs. In the whole long era since Franklin Roosevelt took office, the U.S. has never looked so weak as it does today.

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**W**E LOOK weak militarily, because we are — at any rate, in relation to the Soviet Union. We look weak politically, because we are — as a direct result of the mess in Washington. These are fundamentals which the most astute policy-making and ablest negotiating cannot overcome.

In sum, the mess in Washington of course flows rather directly from the Watergate mess. Here is the source of the sourness of the Congress, the governmental paralysis, the weakness of the White House. All might yet be well, if we could just get the Watergate mess out of the way, one way or the other.