

Impact of Buckley Plea

Senator's Request That Nixon Resign Deepens the President's Difficulties

NYTimes By JAMES M. NAUGHTON MAR 21 1974

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 20—Special Watergate prosecutor Senator James L. Buckley's plea and the House impeachment inquiry.

for President Nixon's resignation as an act of courage has been spurned by the President and scorned by other Republican conservatives, but Mr. Buckley's proposal had a sharp impact on Watergate and the long, tortuous process of impeachment because it both illustrated and deepened the difficulties that threaten to bring the second Nixon Administration to a premature end.

The Senator from New York based his request yesterday on the premise that Mr. Nixon could no longer command the moral respect necessary to govern the nation. The President promptly rejected resignation as "bad statesmanship" but said nothing last night in Houston to alleviate the doubts of Mr. Buckley and others about his capacity to regenerate public respect for his Administration. The latest Gallup Poll suggests that only one American in four approves of the President's performance.

Colleagues Surprised

Even so, Mr. Buckley's plea startled his colleagues in Washington not because of the moral tone on which it was founded but because of the political implications it conveyed. The fact that the plea came from a life-long Republican, a Conservative ideologue and a previously staunch ally of Mr. Nixon at least diminished and perhaps crippled the current campaign by the White House to suggest that the President's critics are either irresponsible liberals or Democratic partisans.

Watergate, Mr. Buckley declared, has become a national trauma, a fundamental crisis dominating political dialogue and breeding such "felt truths" as a "perception of corruption that has effectively destroyed the President's ability to speak from a position of moral leadership."

Similar indictments of Mr. Nixon's leadership have been made by figures such as Senator George McGovern, the South Dakota Democrat who lost the 1972 election to him, and Senator Walter F. Mondale, the Minnesota Democrat who would like to be the party's 1976 nominee to succeed him.

Contradicts White House

"Not until today, however, had such a negative assessment of Mr. Nixon's ability to survive Watergate been pronounced by a public figure with Mr. Buckley's credentials, as co-chairman of the New York Committee to Re-elect the President barely 16 months ago.

Moreover in urging resignation on Mr. Nixon, Senator Buckley contradicted a White House position that has become the primary justification for the President's refusal to supply tape recordings, documents and other evidence to the

Mr. Nixon has contended that he is attempting to preserve the Presidency from unwarranted invasions of White House privacy. But Mr. Buckley asserted yesterday that Watergate and the long, tortuous process of impeachment threatened to weaken the Presidency, in a "slow, agonizing, inch-by-inch process of attrition" and, he said, "in order to preserve the Presidency, Richard Nixon must resign as President."

Differ as to Means

Other conservatives recoiled from Senator Buckley's means, but not necessarily from the end he proposed. Representative Dan Kuykendall, Republican of Tennessee, called the precedent of a Presidential resignation "dangerous." Senator Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina, said through an aide that the House impeachment inquiry was the proper channel for resolving any doubts about Mr. Nixon's leadership.

And Representative Walter Flowers of Alabama, a conservative Democrat who sits on the House panel weighing impeachment, read a statement today in which he said, "Mr. President, do not resign. You may be impeached, even convicted. But do not resign."

Thus Mr. Buckley's aggrieved statement had the effect of highlighting and defining the President's dwindling base of support. Furthermore, it appeared to strip the White House of one of its most forceful defenses against those seeking to remove Mr. Nixon from the Oval Office.

Support May Be Cut

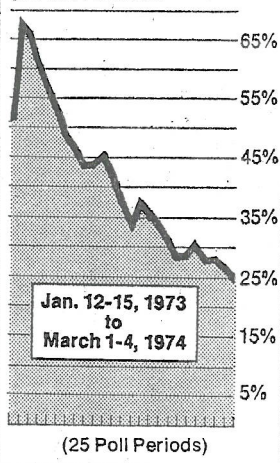
So long as resignation was a course urged only by identifiable liberal Republicans, such as Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts or Gov. Tom McCall of Oregon, or by outspoken Democrats, such as Representative Wilbur D. Mills of Arkansas most recently, the President might dismiss it as political opportunism. Now it is being suggested as well from within the confines of the Republican rightwing, and that may diminish Mr. Nixon's capacity to muster the support of conservatives against the impeachment or resignation.

Senator Buckley's statement came as much of Capitol Hill was beginning to presume that a vote by the House to impeach the President was no longer unthinkable and was perhaps even likely.

The Senator from New York said he was reluctant to speak out because he did not wish to give "the smallest aid and comfort" to those in the media who, in his view, had been trying to use Watergate to "subvert the decisive mandate of the 1972 election." Even so, it was Mr. Buckley who declared yesterday that "the Pres-

President Nixon's Popularity as Measured by the Gallup Poll

Question: Do you approve of the way Nixon is handling his job as President?



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ident has been stripped of the ability to fulfill that mandate" and thus his words may echo across the country more reasonably than any comments from Mr. Nixon's critics.