

Nixon's Shadow In Illinois

By Tom Wicker

CHICAGO, April 11 — After Ab Mikva, the Democratic candidate for Congress in the Tenth District of Illinois, spoke this morning to history students at the Evanston Township High School, the same questions kept coming at him in differing forms: How could the students be sure he was an honest man? Why should they trust him?

Having already made public his net worth and his tax return, Mr. Mikva advocated a variety of disclosures and ethics laws and told the students that people can keep politicians honest by involving themselves in politics the year around, not just on Election Day. "But I don't think I convinced them," he said later.

An old campaigner who has been in the State Legislature and who served two terms in Congress from a Chicago district that no longer exists, Mr. Mikva has become used to honesty questions this year. Obviously, they have to a large extent been inspired by the Watergate experience.

This is no small matter, because the Illinois Tenth is almost classically a district in which Watergate could make a major difference. Moreover, the political situation here suggests the basic reason why Richard Nixon is likely to be impeached, and why the politics of impeachment is not as simple as might appear.

Created in 1972 from a part of what had been a strongly Republican and conservative district—represented for years by Marguerite Stitt Church, then briefly by Donald Rumsfeld—the Tenth encompasses Evanston, Winnetka, Skokie and other areas just north of Chicago. It is the most affluent district in Illinois but is no longer so Republican or so conservative. Voters are about a third Democrat, a third Republican and a third independent, and also are about evenly divided between Catholics, Jews and Protestants. There

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is even a leavening mix of "pale-blue-collar" neighborhoods, where some highly skilled and well paid wage-workers live.

In 1972, Richard Nixon carried the Tenth by about 60,000 votes (out of about 240,000) but still trailed Illinois' liberal Republican Senator, Charles Percy, by 20,000 votes. On the other hand Ab Mikva—moving into the district when his own was divided among three others—lost it by only 7,000 to his Republican opponent, Samuel Young. Even in the Nixon landslide,

Mr. Mikva, hurt badly in a well-heeled district by George McGovern's tax-rich proposals—managed to turn around 53,000 Nixon voters.

Polls taken last fall showed him slightly behind Mr. Young; but as their rematch has progressed, and as Mr. Nixon's fortunes have steadily declined, Mr. Mikva's more recent polls put him somewhat in the lead. He is a well-known and outspoken liberal who differs with conservative Mr. Young on a wide variety of economic and social issues, and Watergate certainly is not the only reason he is running strongly.

Yet, on a popularity "thermometer" by which poll-takers rated several politicians' standings from one (least approval to ten (most approval), Tenth District voters gave Richard Nixon only two points, while Senator Percy scored six, and Democratic Senator Adlai Stevenson and Mr. Mikva were about five. Even Mr. Young was rated at five, although Mr. Mikva is not letting the Tenth District forget that his opponent advertised in 1972 that a vote for him was a vote in support of Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Young's close identification with Mr. Nixon, in fact, may be his major problem. Last fall, for example, he brought in Gen. Alexander Haig, Mr. Nixon's principal aide, to speak at a fund-raising dinner, and the general is said to have made an all-out Nixon pitch, with little mention of Mr. Young. "I wish he'd bring in Haig more often," Mr. Mikva confesses.

More seriously, Mr. Mikva—who has been calling for impeachment since January—believes Mr. Nixon's political standing has been lowered even further by his tax troubles. And he concludes that Mr. Young's previous support for Mr. Nixon is such a liability that the only way he can deal with it will be to vote for impeachment. To his stalwart Republican backers—W. Clement Stone, the big Nixon contributor is among them—Mr. Young can explain that such a vote is only for a fair trial in the Senate, which might clear Mr. Nixon.

If so, that is a situation not peculiar to the Tenth District, which is why impeachment is likely. Paradoxically, Mr. Mikva is not particularly pleased at the prospect that his Republican opponent might vote to impeach. By so voting, he fears, Mr. Young will gain "instant honesty"; he will look like a courageous politician willing to stand up and be counted even against a President of his own party, and image that might be of great help to him among the independent voters either man needs to win in the Tenth District.

For that reason, Mr. Mikva is worried about the Nixon strategy of stall and delay; he would like to see the impeachment vote taken as soon as possible, so that any gains Mr. Young might make with a ye vote could be countered well before Election Day.