

In nation's capital, a litany of despair fills the air

Analysis

By Robert Boyd and Loye Miller Jr.
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WASHINGTON — A sense of impending doom swept over this jittery capital last week — perhaps the worst week in Richard Nixon's tumultuous career.

Even more than during the Saturday Night Massacre last October, there was a feeling that this was a crisis that he could not survive.

As the import of the President's Watergate transcripts sank in around the country, great gaping cracks opened in the bedrock of the Nixon constituency — the solid conservative voices of Middle America and the Republican legions in Congress who are his dwindling hope of staving-off impeachment.

"There is a landslide going on up here," said a Republican senator from a conservative border state.

"Impeachment is a foregone conclusion," said a party leader from the Middle West.

The ominous new note is that the pressure is now coming from Republican politicians who see the sacrifice of the President as their only hope of avoiding disaster at the polls this November and who are already discussing ways to persuade him to resign.

They are emboldened by the disillusionment of long-time Nixon oracles like the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times and the Omaha World Herald and a swelling tide of anti-Nixon feeling from ordinary Americans.

House Republican Leader John Rhodes said his mail is running eight-to-one against the President, most of it calling for him to resign.

Senate Assistant Republican Leader Robert Griffin said his mail is 10-to-1 against the President.

The trend was clear in the comment of McDill "Huck" Boyd, Republican national committeeman from Kansas, a member of the GOP national executive committee and a party loyalist for 40 years.

A week ago, before he read the transcripts, Boyd said he didn't think they would make much difference or change anyone's mind.

But after reading some of them, Boyd said he was "shocked" at the "evasive tone. . . . The President's failure to express moral indignation.

"As a longtime party worker and party official, I feel dirtied by it all. I almost feel a sense of personal betrayal," Boyd said.

A top North Dakota Republican echoed: "If I were the President, I'd start packing. The gold is turning to mud all over the place. People know my loyalty, and so they're as polite as they can be when they talk to me, and they're still completely negative. I can only imagine how rough they're talking among themselves."

A veteran California party professional said "there has been nothing but negative reaction, and it's going from bad to worse. A lot of people think the President is in trouble who didn't think so a week ago. At the least this means that he'll be impeached. Beyond that, I'm not sure."

Among Congressional Republicans, a mood of near-panic was spreading.

Rep. Charles Whalen (R.-Ohio), who hosted a meeting of about a dozen liberal Republicans in his office last

Wednesday, said, "you can just smell it all over the place—revulsion tempered with panic."

Whalen's so-called "Wednesday Group" discussed ways of organizing a delegation of national leaders who could call on the President and suggest that he resign for the good of the country and the party.

"There is a mounting feeling among all Republican House members that he (Nixon), has just got to go," Whalen declared.

A batch of conservative House Republicans known as the SOS group caucused to discuss a similar proposal. And Senate Republicans were also engaged in similar emergency planning.

As the storm mounted and the House Judiciary Committee began formally hearing evidence that could lead to the President's impeachment, the White House maintained its iron insistence that he will never, never quit.

Nevertheless, there were signs of alarm and discouragement in Nixon's circle. One top aide said it was obviously a mistake to have released the transcripts, that the President would have been better off defying the Judiciary Committee subpoena.

One GOP senator said the erosion is so rapid that "even they (the White House) might have to realize that there is no way they can hold the votes over here."

He was referring to the 34 votes (one-third plus one of the Senate's 100 members) that Nixon would have to hold to keep from being removed from office after a Senate trial.