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Pro-Impeachment View Wins Respect

By Ken Ringle

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The people of Virginia spoke of Rep. M. Caldwell Butler (R-Va.), their man on the House Judiciary Committee of pride and dismay yesterday, with a after his dramatic declaration of intent to support the impeachment of President Nixon.

"It was a very eloquent expression of the Republican anguish over Watergate . . . said Republican state chairman Richard Obenshain of Butler's televised statement Thursday before the committee.

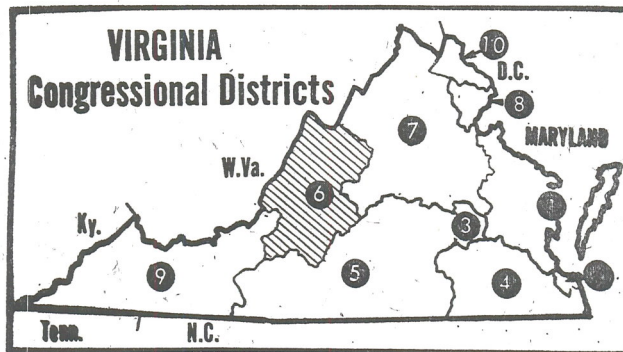
"But, I think personally there has to be some distinction between that anguish and the constitutional requirement for proof of high crimes and misdemeanors."

To Obenshain and to many others in the state, Virginia remains Nixon country: a state the President has never lost in an election and a state that has fielded a congressional delegation more consistently loyal to the President's legislative objectives than any other in the land.

Virginia is also Caldwell Butler country, a state that has given increasing respect to the bespectacled Roanoke lawyer with the receding chin who was an eloquent voice for Virginia Republicanism when there weren't many others around.

In Washington Butler has been labeled a conservative because of his legislative record: he has supported the President 75 per cent of the time.

In Virginia he is also remembered as a political foe of the old conservative Byrd Democratic organization and a champion of such hard-fought progressive



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Shaded area shows M. Caldwell Butler's district.

causes as an end to the state poll tax.

Those who remembered that of Caldwell Butler were not surprised by his stand.

"He is a person with a considerable sense of honor and the fitness of things," said Del. Ray Garland, a Republican state legislator from Butler's hometown of Roanoke.

"I think he was personally offended by the seaminess (of Watergate). He is seldom ambiguous in his opinion of men and events. He has never been a man to suffer fools gladly."

There were, of course, some who were surprised, but they are usually those who don't know Butler.

"I think it's going to hurt him," said one generally conservative political leader in Lynchburg, another city in Butler's strongly pro-Nixon Sixth District. "People around here are still strong for the President and I was surprised Butler spoke as he did," said the conservative who requested anonymity.

But he, like most others reached around the state yesterday, was willing to give Butler the benefit of the doubt.

"He's a lawyer and he's gone into it," the political leader said. "He's listened to the tapes and most people haven't."

Much the same sentiment was voiced by Republican Gov. Mills E. Godwin Jr., who told newsmen in Richmond Butler had made "a fine statement, but not necessarily one I agree with."

In response to reporters' questions, Godwin said Butler's statement would have an impact on the Virginia GOP, "but I could not judge at this time what it would be."

Butler, he said, was speaking "from personal conviction" after having access to much evidence that the rest of Americans have not yet seen.

Butler faces three opponents in November: Democrat Paul Puckett, the present sheriff of Roanoke, and two independents, Timothy A. McGay of Goshen and Warren D. Saunders of Goodview, none of whom could be reached for comment yesterday.

Virtually everyone questioned thought Butler would win re-election with ease.

"Republicans around here will back any Republican

unless he's caught in bed with a live man or a dead woman," said one Roanoke Democratic leader.

"His vote hasn't helped the economy a bit—and that's a big issue around here—but I can't fault him for his stand. He wants his party to help clean up their own house."

Garland, who has represented Roanoke in the General Assembly since 1968, said Butler could expect some immediate slippage of support from the older, wealthier Republicans who traditionally bankroll GOP campaigns in the lower Shenandoah Valley.

"But I think they'll come back," he said. "Conservatives really have no place else to go."

Puckett, Garland said, is a "low voltage candidate," and what erosion of Republican support Butler experiences due to his impeachment stand "will be more than offset by his gains among Democrats and independents."

Peter White, a GOP city councilman in Lynchburg, said "we put him up there to do a job for us. Not always what we want, but what he thinks is right. And I think he's doing that. But I sure wish there was some way we could settle this thing without impeaching the President."

Said the Roanoke Times newspaper yesterday morning:

"We might have different opinions as to which articles of impeachment deserve to go to the House . . . but we respect the way Mr. Butler has gone about his job . . . We respect his decision and believe most of his constituents will also—even those who wish the evidence could have persuaded Mr. Butler differently."