

# What's Best For America?

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, July 30—The main change here in the last couple of weeks is that the Capital is beginning to get used to the idea of impeachment and is starting to think beyond the debate in the House of Representatives.

In the last few days, the leaders of both parties have been planning for a trial of the President in the Senate; Senator Dole of Kansas has called for additional security for Vice President Ford; Time magazine has been identifying the coming leaders of America; Father Hesberg of Notre Dame has been calling in Newsweek for a collective leadership in a Government of national reconciliation.

After the Supreme Court decision on the tapes against the President and bipartisan support in the House Judiciary Committee for his impeachment, it is widely assumed here that at least a majority of members of the House

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and Senate will vote to impeach and convict, and this has raised a broader question about the future.

How, even if two-thirds of the Senate did not vote to remove Mr. Nixon from office, could he hope to govern the country effectively for eighteen months, and preside over the 200th anniversary of the nation with only a quarter of the people having confidence in his leadership?

Sam Garrison, the Republican counsel in the House Judiciary Committee, has suggested that even if a case could be made for impeaching the President, members should consider whether impeaching him would be in the interests of the country. They are obviously taking this into consideration, but lately many of them have also been thinking about the consequences of *not* impeaching him.

For it is fairly clear that the last year and a half of Mr. Nixon's term is going to be a turbulent time, with high rates of inflation, prices, and unemployment.

So long as the President's men in the White House hoped to hold the Republicans together by presenting the case as a partisan and ideological conflict, there was a fair chance that they could avoid impeachment by the whole House.

But their tactics of discrediting the Judiciary by condemning it in public as a "kangaroo court" have obviously backfired. They could not dismiss the Supreme Court in these terms, and the indications now are that the President has lost much support even among his natural supporters in the South and Middle West. In fact, the President is now confronted by the fact that some of his most enthusiastic backers in the past have now formed a committee of conservatives for impeachment.

Thus, beyond the immediate controversies over the proper test of impeachment and whether the President has been guilty of specific crimes or general failure to sustain the principles and ideals of the constitution, this more general question of "What's best for America?" is coming to the fore. And when members are in doubt, this may in the end be the decisive question.

Mr. Nixon is being urged to go on national television and argue his favorite thesis: That a vote for impeachment is a vote for weakening the Presidency, and jeopardizing the security of the Republic and the peace and order of the world.

This is the main theme of the Republican minority leader in the House, Representative John J. Rhodes of Arizona, as he tries to hold the Republicans together to defeat the Judiciary Committee's articles of impeachment: to vote against the President, he suggests, is to vote against the Republican party and the nation. But this general argument is not holding the party together any better than the specific arguments against impeachment. In the first place, most members of Congress, unlike the Ehrlichmans and Halde-mans, are not confusing loyalty to Mr. Nixon with loyalty to country, and when they do think of the future of the party, many of them believe that impeachment is not only good for the nation but good for the Republican party.

Even members of the President's own Cabinet, and some of his most influential party supporters outside the Congress and the executive agree in private on two points:

First, even if the President manages to squeak through by a few votes, he will have to preside over a lame-duck Government that will not have the votes or the confidence to deal with the serious economic and political problems of the next year and a half.

Second, his impeachment in these circumstances would not be bad but good for the country and would not be bad but good for the Republican party.

For in partisan terms, Mr. Ford would take over the Presidency, untainted by Watergate and the other scandals, and would be available to seek re-election in 1976 as a presiding President against a deeply divided Democratic party.

Accordingly, even those arguments about the future and what's best for the country are now running against the President. For the deepest longing of the Congress and the people seems to be to get these scandals behind them, and get on to new beginnings that may bring about the reconciliation if not the unity of the nation.