

WXPPost Nixon Senate Support Ebbs

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Present Lineup: 60-40

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The Senate may already be only seven to nine votes short of the 67 needed to oust President Nixon from office if the House sends over a bill of impeachment.

That is the view of about a dozen of the Senate's best vote counters, surveyed by The Washington Post.

While stressing that senators aren't locked into any final positions and may well shift their views during the course of the anticipated trial, they estimate that 58 to 60 senators probably are "leaning toward" a vote to oust Mr. Nixon.

And they say there is a strong possibility that the needed two-thirds vote will eventually be obtained.

"I'd say it's about 60 to 40," said one of the best GOP vote-counters. "I see no pluses whatever for the President. I think his chances of getting convicted are a helluva lot stronger than a few weeks ago. If Barry Goldwater leaves the reservation, it's all over."

Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), former GOP national chairman and a candidate for re-election, said, "I've been hearing 60 to 40 against the President. I'm not certain it's accurate and don't know what the mood of the country will be in a few months when we get to a vote. Suppose inflation improves and people get tired of the impeachment issue—maybe he'll come up in the polls."

Dole added that he hasn't made up

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his own mind yet and said, "I don't feel any obligation to get out and defend the President [on the floor]. Some Senators would be willing to do so if they had all the facts, but who's going to stand up and say anything if it turns out to be less than accurate?"

Sen. Gale W. McGee (D-Wyo.), who supported Mr. Nixon on most military and foreign-policy issues during the Vietnam war, said, "His support is eroding every day."

"It's anybody's guess," said Russell B. Long (D-La.), also a Nixon supporter on many policy issues. "There may not be enough votes at the moment but his position has eroded; there is every indication it's going to get worse. I'd say more than half would vote for conviction now. I don't know how I'm going to vote."

One prominent GOP senator has placed the anti-Nixon vote at 58 to 42 at with another 20 possibly go-present, another at 60 to 20 ing either day. Two of the Senate's best Democratic vote counters both said "I

think there will be enough votes" unless the President comes up with new evidence to overcome the impact of what has already come out.

Sen. John Tower (D-Tex.) cautioned that it is precipitous to say "how the final vote will come out, warning that neither he, nor virtually any other senator he knew, is "locked into anything." (Tower is generally viewed as pro-Nixon.) So, Tower said, "even people who have already tentatively made up their minds can change them." Tower said he has no leaning one way or the other.

Nevertheless, there appears to be strong and widespread feeling among senators that President Nixon has been losing ground for months and has made no gains whatever in the Senate.

Possibly the most significant factor is the shrinkage of what has been called the "hard-core" pro-Nixon vote. A few months ago, White House backers were asserting, "we've got 40 to 50 votes against conviction by the Senate, all day every day."

That confident tone is gone, and conservatives who were believed to be Nixon bitter-enders are talking privately about wanting out. One Southern Republican, has shifted in recent months and has been telling associates that unless the White House comes up with some amazing new evidence on Mr. Nixon's behalf, he finds it hard to imagine himself voting "no" when the impeachment vote is cast following the Senate trial. He said he fervently hopes the President will resign before it comes to that, and save the nation and the GOP from severe disruption. This view is shared by many Republicans.

One comparison that is being heard around the Senate involved the case of former Sen. Thomas Dodd (D-Conn.).

On June 23, 1967, the Senate censured Dodd by a 92-to-5 vote for using political campaign contributions to cover his private living expenses, in the full knowledge that it would destroy his career and shatter his life.

A Democratic senator be-

lieved planning to vote for impeachment said, "Tom Dodd was a helluva lot more popular around here than Richard Nixon, and when you compare what he did with what Nixon is accused of doing—well, I think Nixon's going to be hurt. The conventional view before Dodd's censure was that the Senate will never do it to a friend. But they did it 92 to 5."

A factor working against the President is the poor relations he and his top command staff—John D. Ehrlichman, H.R. Haldeman—had during the first years of his term with members of Congress.

"There's an old show-biz adage that it's always wise to be good to people on your way up, because you'll meet the same people on your way down," said one GOP figure. "That may undo him. When you get down to questionable issues that can go either way, the treatment he's given senators may undo him."

Asked about this issue, Dole said, "The President hasn't observed that adage, but . . . it doesn't necessarily follow they'll vote against him because of that."