

Joseph Kraft WXPPost

AUG 4 1974

# The Impeachment Juggernaut

The impeachment juggernaut is now rolling on Capitol Hill. Even the actions of Mr. Nixon's best friends spell trouble for the President. So the serious question is whether the country wouldn't be better off if he stepped down.

Probably the worst news for Mr. Nixon comes from his supporters on the Senate side of the Capitol. Barry Goldwater, for example, is crucial if Mr. Nixon is to survive the Senate vote to confirm impeachment. While known to have doubts about Mr. Nixon's behavior, Sen. Goldwater has been very loath to say anything which might be interpreted as doing the work of those eager to get the President.

But early in the week, Sen. Goldwater suggested that maybe the President should answer questions from senators and representatives in the well of the House. That's a polite way of saying that it's up to Mr. Nixon now—that even the senator from Arizona can't be counted upon.

Russell Long of Louisiana has long been counted as a sure bet for Mr. Nixon in his impeachment trial. The President carried Louisiana by 70 per cent of the vote in 1972.

Moreover, Mr. Long's father, Huey Long, was the victim of an impeachment move early in his stormy career. The younger Long has been so sensitive on the subject that he even opposed, with all his force and to the bit-

*"The impeachment process is so thoroughly on track that few in Congress will even be drawn into speculation about any other outcome."*

ter end, the censure voted by the Senate against Thomas Dodd of Connecticut.

But last week there came out of Long's office a poll which the senator had taken of opinion in Louisiana. Contrary to almost every expectation, the poll showed that most of the state was in favor of impeachment. In north central Louisiana—a rural region which counts two of the President's strongest congressional supporters, Joe Waggoner and Otto Passman, as its representatives—the poll showed 55 per cent for impeachment against 32 per cent opposed and 13 per cent unsure.

On the House side of the Capitol, the tone has been set by the solid and somber bipartisan vote for impeachment in the Judiciary Committee. Republicans bound to the President are looking for any way off the hook.

Hence the suggestion by Minority Leader John Rhodes and Rep. Delbert

Latta of Ohio that, in voting on the impeachment charges, the full House be given the chance to go for censure instead. Hence also the suggestion, by a couple of junior Republican members eager to escape responsibility, that the House ratify the decision of the Judiciary Committee as a mere formality without a debate which would put them on the line and damage the President.

Neither suggestion has a chance. Nor does there seem to be any future for the one serious hope the White House might entertain—namely, that the Democrats would hold off impeachment because they would not like to put Gerald Ford in the White House with a good chance to win in 1976.

Any thought that that attitude might prevail was scotched when Mr. Ford played golf with the House Majority Leader, Tip O'Neill, on Wednesday. The picture of the two old friends, strolling arm in arm down the fairway,

left no doubt that the Democrats would not back away from impeachment just to do the dirty on Mr. Ford.

Indeed, the impeachment process is now so thoroughly on track that very few representatives or senators will even be drawn into speculation about any other outcome. When the subject of resignation is raised, the usual tactic is to refer to the 25 per cent of the nation which registers hardcore support for the President. It is argued that the hardcore Nixonites will continue to harbor feelings of suspicion and enmity toward the majority unless the impeachment road is followed to the end.

For my own part, I wonder. What Mr. Nixon now faces is a chamber of horrors. He will be publicly dishonored. He will have enormous financial burdens to bear. He stands a chance of going to prison.

I do not suppose that any procedural niceties are going to make these lumps any more palatable to the President and his followers. Moreover, the serious problems which go almost untended because of impeachment—notably inflation—are only going to become worse. So it seems to me that everybody stands to gain if Mr. Nixon can be brought to step down on his own motion.