

Favorable Reaction in Alabama

On His Votes Startles Flowers

By R. W. APPLE Jr.

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala., Aug. 5—This is what some of Representative Walter Flowers's friends and neighbors are saying about his votes, cast after mental torment sufficient to give him an ulcer, to impeach President Nixon on two counts:

Charlotte Mears, a conservative, middle-aged housewife—"He did the right thing. When Nixon didn't give over the tapes, a lot of people decided he was trying to cover up something. He just has to be."

Robert S. Vance, a moderate Democrat who serves as Alabama's Democratic national committeeman—"The avalanche has started. Everyone down here has known Nixon was a crook all along, but they didn't want to impeach him because we voted for him. Now Walter Flowers isn't out for Nixon's scalp—everyone knows that—so they believe him when he says he voted his conscience."

James Oakley, the Wallaceite editor of the weekly Ctnerville Press—"The only people who are uptight about what Walter did are the die-hard Republicans, and they don't count for nothing. I think people saw Walter on TV, saw he was sincere, and that helped him a lot."

'A Lot of Rhetoric'

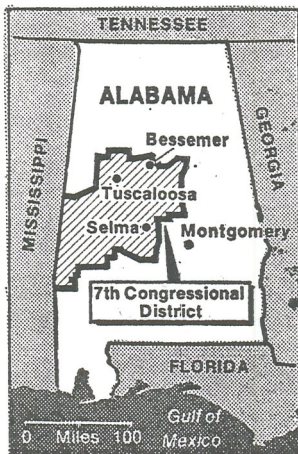
Mayor Clarence Hinton of Tuscaloosa — "It's disgusting. I think it's a lot of rhetoric. A bunch of people up there trying to get national exposure."

William D. Nelson, an employe in a state liquor store who voted Republican in 1972 — "I'm behind him 100 per cent. He knows the evidence and I don't. And he's a very smart lawyer."

Frank M. Moody, president of the First National Bank of Tuscaloosa and a Flowers contributor — "It was an awfully hard thing to do, like sitting on a jury in a capital case and voting for the death penalty. But as distasteful as it was, I have to say that I approve."

The reaction, in short, has been largely favorable — and that has startled Mr. Flowers, a 41-year-old Democrat whose district voted 2 to 1 for Mr. Nixon two years ago.

"Looking into it from the



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other side of the vote 10 days ago," he said this morning at a news conference, "I had a premonition that there would be a near-unanimous reaction against my position. It hasn't materialized."

Mr. Flowers came back to his district on Friday, spending the weekend at his summer home on Lake Tuscaloosa, mowing the lawn, tending to a weed-filled garden that he describes as "another casualty of Watergate," and drinking "a few Coors beers."

At the news conference this morning, for the first time since the votes in the House Judiciary Committee, he exposed himself, as he put it, "to public schools and criticism, not necessarily in that order."

The scene was a courtroom in the Federal Building on one of the main streets of this somnolent city of 70,000, where Gov. George C. Wallace stood "in the schoolhouse door" in a vain effort to block the integration of the University of Alabama. Washington and the kleig lights were 750 miles away, but Walter Flowers sounded exactly the same.

The case against the President, he said, "is no half-way case; there's no shortage of evidence, it's not all circumstantial, and it's not something you can hang on H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman and John Dean."

"The case I saw," he said, "was strong enough for me to have voted to convict and remove him from office if I was sitting in the Senate."

When a reporter asked whether he would change his

mind if he saw that his district disagreed with him, he replied stonily: "No way. Absolutely no way."

Mr. Flowers said last week in Washington that he did not "propose to function like a computer" that exactly reflected his constituents' sentiment. On some issues, he argued, overriding national considerations came into play.

"Occasionally — and impeachment is certainly one of those times—you have to vote the people's interests rather than the people's will," he said.

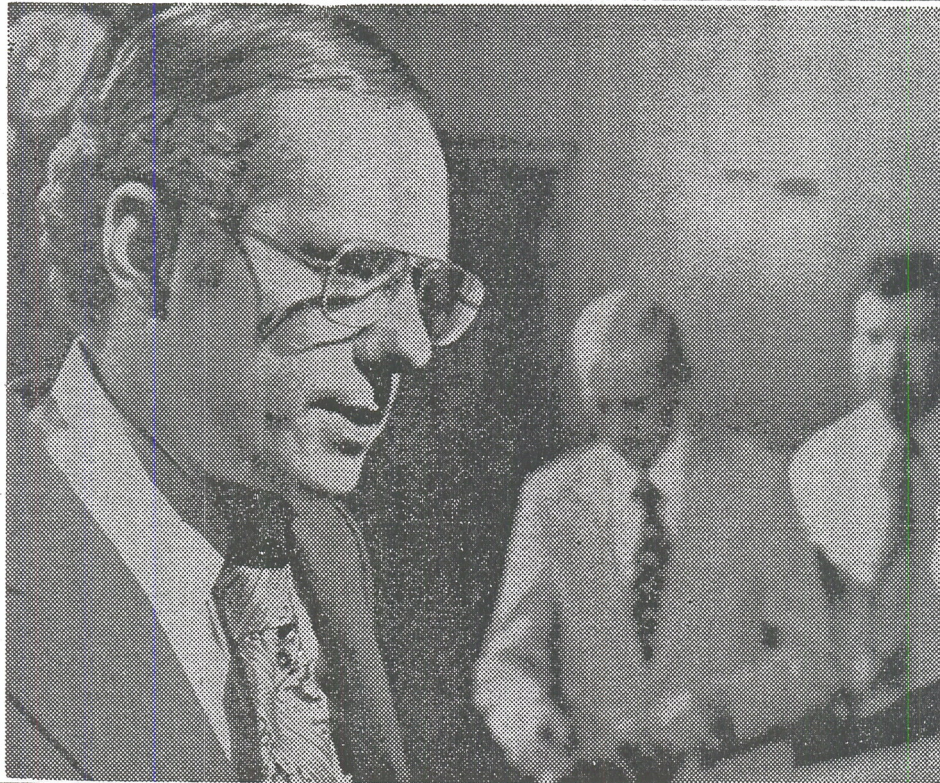
This was not a radical, not a liberal, not even a maverick speaking. There is a Confederate flag behind Mr. Flowers's desk, and an autographed photo of Governor Wallace hangs on the wall near his membership certificate in Phi Beta Kappa.

He thinks he and many of his colleagues will look at life differently after having passed through the storms of impeachment.

"We all tell ourselves all the time that if our consciences cry out, we'll vote for something even if it's political suicide," he said. "Well, that's fine, in a vacuum. Now I've done it—I've bitten the cannonball, never mind the bullet—and I feel good."

Results of Honesty

"I think the reaction shows that if we're honest, if we vote our convictions and explain them, if we show a little leadership, people will follow us further than we thought they would."



Barry Fikes/The Tuscaloosa News

Representative Walter Flowers, Alabama Democrat, at his news session in Tuscaloosa

Mr. Flowers did all that he could to soften the blow of what he considered a very impolitic decision.

He turned parliamentary somersaults, offering motions he himself opposed, to get as much evidence onto television and before his constituents as possible. He emphasized allegations of illicit Nixon contributions to Mr. Wallace's 1971 opponent, former Gov. Albert Brewer. He voted against and debated lustily against three other articles of impeachment.

"Aw, you've got to give me a little demagoguery," he said when a friend twitted

him for the savagery of his attack on the Cambodia bombing article. "Think of all I gave up. I do have my constituents, you know."

Mr. Flower's political future appears to be in no jeopardy. He has no Republican opponent, and the independent candidate who hopes to oust him, Frank Walls, is given little chance, although he plans to try to exploit the impeachment issue.

By traipsing back and forth across the district in the next two years, Mr. Flowers thinks he can repair whatever damage he may have done by his votes. The

weekly press, a potent factor in this sprawling district, has already begun that job; it is solidly on Mr. Flowers's side.

The Democrat-Reporter of Linden, for example, saluted him as "a man with a compassionate heart but also a man with the fortitude to do what is right according to the letter of the law."

But Mr. Flowers plans no campaigning just now.

"I don't want to confront my friend who opposed what I've done while emotions are still high," he said. "He might build a wall between us that neither of us could tear down later on."