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INVESTIGATION OF WATERGATE 6 DAYS AFTER BREAK-IN; EXPECTS IMPEACHMENT; SUPPORT EBBS

SENATORS GLOOMY

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G.O.P. Leaders See Defense Weakened In Case of Trial

NYTimes

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 5—Key Republican Senators said today that President Nixon's latest release of Watergate transcripts would weaken his defense in what they expect may be an expedited Senate trial.

Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, the Republican whip in the Senate, early in the day, had called on the President to resign. After Mr. Nixon's announcement about the tapes, the Senator expressed disappointment that the President seemed determined to force a trial in the Senate.

Senator Robert Dole of Kansas said: "I just think he loses. I just think everything is downhill." He spoke while standing with half a dozen colleagues around a television set in the Senate Republican cloakroom to hear the news of further tapes of White House conversations "at variance," in Mr. Nixon's words, "with certain of my previous statements."

'Set of Inconsistencies'

Senator Pete V. Domenici of New Mexico said: "It's another set of inconsistencies. The whole thing weakens the position of the President substantially."

Senator John G. Tower of Texas quoted from the poetry of Greek tragedy: "And now a wave of melancholy tranquillity settles over Thebes," he said.

Senator Peter H. Dominick of Colorado called the President's statement "sorrowful news."

The five Republicans were all included among the 34 Senators whom the White House has been counting on as being needed to vote against Mr. Nixon's removal from office. But they and others were saying today that no votes in support of the President could be taken for granted any longer.

Backing Found Dissolving

And while all denied that any nose counts had been taken, Senators in a broad political spectrum observed that Mr. Nixon's backing was dissolving rapidly. One senior Republican observed this morning, before the report of the new tapes was released, that all but a half-dozen of the 43 Republicans in the Senate would heave a sigh of relief if Mr. Nixon decided to resign.

In the Senate, Mr. Nixon's statement was read as giving license to anguished Republicans in the House to vote for impeachment, if only to bring on the Senate trial that the President described as inevitable.

The President's analysis that

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House impeachment is a "foregone conclusion" is "accurate," said Senator Dole. But he added that Mr. Nixon's concession hardly strengthened his over-all position.

"It's overwhelming in the House," said Mr. Dole, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee who is facing opposition for re-election, it's going to be tough in the Senate."

Senate Republican leaders looked depressed, almost stunned, as they left an hour-long briefing with White House aides in the office of Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the minority leader.

St. Clair's 'Bad News'

James D. St. Clair, the President's chief defense lawyer, had opened the meeting by saying he had "bad news." He also declared flatly that Mr. Nixon would not resign. He was aided in the briefing by J. Fred Buzhardt, counsel to the President, and by William E. Timmons, the chief White House lobbyist on Capitol Hill.

"Everybody was very calm, very philosophical, no expressions of anger," Senator Tower reported on the meeting afterward. "No one raised his voice. Hugh kept puffing away on his pipe."

"You can only conclude that the new evidence is damaging evidence," Mr. Tower added. "But I do feel it has to be considered in the context of all the evidence. I don't want to prejudge the case."

Senator Scott released a two-line statement on behalf of the leaders, saying, "The President took the proper action in releasing essential information

prior to the House vote." said. "That's it," Senator Scott commented to reporters. "There will be no further statement by the leadership."

'Some Learn Late'

Others sought to put the best possible face on matters.

"Honesty is the best policy," said Senator Jesse A. Helms, Republican of North Carolina. "Some people learn it early, some people learn it late."

Still more were openly gloomy. Senator Bill Brock of Tennessee, another of the conservative Republicans listed as essential to Mr. Nixon's survival, said the new information had "damaged the President's defense." "It was a distressing release," he said.

Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts, the first Republican Senator to call for Mr. Nixon's resignation months ago, said: "I just feel the President ought to seriously consider the option of resignation. He could save the country, save his party, save himself. It's too much to ask of the country to have this material dribbled out a bit at a time."

More Erosion

Still other Republican senators, like Robert Taft Jr. of Ohio and J. Glenn Beall of Maryland, were pointedly declining to make any assessment of the President's position.

Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, who once said that Mr. Nixon would step down rather than put the country through a painful Senate trial, told his press secretary he would make absolutely no comment today.

Senator Griffin's call for resignation, coming from the second ranking Republican in the Senate, was widely taken to be

another shattering blow to the President's eroding base.

"We've arrived at a point where both the national interest and his own interest will best be served by resigning," the Michigan Republican said, his voice quavering as he spoke from handwritten notes before television cameras outside the Senate Rules Committee room shortly before noon.

"It's not just his enemies who feel that way," he contended. "Many of his best friends—and I regard myself as one of those—believe now that this would be the most appropriate course. "Needless to say, this would be an awesome, omst difficult decision for him to reach. But I believe he will see it that way, too."

Mr. Griffin's Republican colleagues interpreted his statement as a warning to the President that the prospects for survival in the Senate were little better than the chances of defeating impeachment in the House. They also guessed, on the basis of his closing sentence, that Mr. Griffin, who has a reputation for speaking literally and with great care, had some private reason for thinking that the President was about to resign.

Mr. Griffin himself said this afternoon he had only known that Mr. Nixon and his staff "were struggling with a decision over the weekend." He said he was disappointed that the President had not taken his advice.