Watergate: will Nixon last?

By Howard Sitter

With the recent developments in the Watergate scandal and released memos of political spying which have been uncovered in Washington, the question now is how the President will be affected. In an informal discussion Wednesday afternoon, MIT Professor of Political Science Walter D. Burnham presented his suggestion: impeachment.

Burnham is one of the nation's foremost authorities on electoral politics. He declined to elaborate in any detail on recent developments in the case, but focused on what he termed a "crisis." Burnham described the impeachment of the President as "an explosive political element applied to the nature of protection to the Republic rather than the punishment of an individual.

He cited Nixon's attempt to cover up the scandal "in the name of national security" and his unprecedented extension of Executive Privilege as a policy that "cannot be viewed as anything other than highly suspect." In essence, Burnham feels that the Congress will probably have enough for a very strong case.

Burnham expounded on four themes that Nixon would likely resort to in order to counteract his seventh crisis. The basic arguments were that of "impeachment," "necessity," "Political Religion," and "Na- tional Unity." In his address to the nation on April 30, the President presented the argument of necessity by contending that he didn't know what was occurring. Burnham suggested that Nixon's long associations with certain political officials, his previous claims of tight campaign management, and previous use of similar tactics applied in the past tend to refute this line of defense.

In order to create an impeachment proceeding, the President could present the argument of necessity, emphasizing the tense international situation. This would require that people come to directly assail the Office of the President since preoccupation with impeachment could endanger the nation's security. Burnham countered that such an argument would divide the public. "If the President is reverted to the argument of necessity by contending that he didn't know what was occurring, Burnham forewarned, "there will be no possibility of a President ever being removed from office in the future." He concreted that the long-term threat to Executive Accountability In the Federal government may be irreversible.

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