



President Nixon prepares to speak after returning from a trip to the Middle East June 19, 1974, in Washington, D.C. On August 9, 1974, Vice President Gerald R. Ford would take the oath of office as president in the wake of the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation. On this month's cover, Richard Nixon announces his resignation from the office of the presidency, August 9, 1974, on the grounds of the White House.

[BOTH PHOTOS BY FRANK FISHER/LIAISON]

Watergate Revisited

BY RICHARD J. McGOWAN

Watergate was more than the fall of Richard Nixon. Historians have had 30 years to dissect the diverse assortment of backgrounds, psyches and political nuances that were arrayed for the scandal to flow and ebb—from G. Gordon Liddy and the Cubans to Nixon and his acolytes and the various prosecutors. They have explored the myriad conspiracy theories but never unearthed anything that altered the irrefutable fact that a paranoid president, surrounded by political amateurs drunk on power, attempted to trample the Constitution. Here's one version of the events of Watergate from the chief investigator and chief-of-staff of then-Sen. Lowell P. Weicker.

On the 30th anniversary of the Watergate break-in, the usual cast of characters made the rounds of talk shows to claim their 15 minutes of fame and pontificate about their role in the conspiracy. Over the years, the same talking heads, from Ben Bradlee, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* to former Nixonites like “born-again” Chuck Colson and the ever self-serving John Dean have been resurrected every Watergate anniversary.

The so-called Watergate era was great drama. It produced heroes and villains; it made rich guys out of the bad guys; saw publishers and networks fork over fortunes so convicted criminals could publicly revise and rationalize their roles in the political raping of America. The American public lined up to read and hear the endless confessions of guilt, the born again emetics of vicious people, the chest-pumping memoirs of minor players in the drama, the endless production of “Deep Throat” guessing games, and the mewlings of pseudo-revisionists.

Still, myths remain: (a) the press brought down the president and, (b) the Senate Watergate Committee played a relatively minor role in the demise of Nixon’s presidency. Equally downplayed is the part one specific senator played in driving the diverse, disorganized and deeply divided committee to deliver the bombshells which kept the nation agog and focused on the ever-expanding scandal.

Miraculously, the Senate Watergate Committee did play a pivotal role and ironically, the select committee would have collapsed from inertia and internal bloodletting had not the least likely junior senator from Connecticut, Lowell P. Weicker Jr., personally taken charge. This is the untold story of how the leftist oaf Weicker became the White Knight of Watergate, however briefly. It was his shining moment in a checkered career in politics. Here is an insider’s account of his and the committee’s performance in that political soap opera about national betrayal.

Watergate made careers in the media, legal and political professions, as well as shattered others. It stamped mediocre politicians with the aura of greatness and infected some with the presi-

dential bug. It turned everyone with a press pass into an “investigative” reporter. It turned ambulance chasers into constitutional scholars. Oddly, only one reporter, author-newsman Timothy Crouse, who went on to write the definitive book on the White House press corps, *The Boys on the Bus*, ever took a comprehensive look at the players on the Senate Watergate Committee.

If one had searched for the most incompetent group of politicians—politically biased in every way—you might have come up with the cast for the Senate Watergate Committee, more formally known as the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities. Chairman Sam Erwin (D-N.C.), who reluctantly took the chairmanship, was often seen dozing during the hearings and tended to let others dictate the committee’s agenda. The Republican minority was led by Tennessee’s Howard Baker, the ambitious son-in-law of the powerful Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. Baker, who maintained a close, personal relationship with the president, was the obvious White House plant on the rudderless committee. Baker was a “finalist” in Nixon’s original vice presidential sweepstakes, which went to Spiro Agnew. Later, Baker rejected Nixon’s offer of a seat on the Supreme Court following the rejections of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. and G. Harrold Carswell.

Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) loomed large and lethargic throughout the proceedings. Dan Inouye (D-Hawaii) gave the impression he would prefer the whole smelly mess to blow away. Joseph Montoya (D-N.M.) was the laughing stock of the committee for his inane questions. The media reveled in the joke about Montoya sitting up late at night at home rehearsing yesterday’s questions.

At least the patrician Ed Gurney (R-Fla.) was totally honest about his support for Nixon. During the hearings, Gurney wrote a heartfelt note to the president in longhand, expressing his undying support. In return, he received a canned response from the White House correspondence office. That bureaucratic reply, and the mounting evidence, eventually drained some of the passion from his defense of the president. Further adding to the confusion were 60-odd staffers for the committee’s Democratic majority and 25 for the

Republican minority. The staff ran the gamut from brilliant to disastrous.

And then there was Weicker—all 6' 6" of him—the bull in the china shop, the Jolly Green Maverick who had no love for Nixon and Chuck Colson in particular. Weicker's father, who was then with the tariff-concerned Textile Conference, had been contacted at some point by Colson. The White House underling told the senior Weicker that the administration would appreciate junior's pro-vote on the controversial anti-ballistic missile system. It was not exactly a bribe offer, but when Weicker heard about it from his father he rushed down to the White House and blasted the ears off Colson.

Colson never seemed to learn. He approached Weicker in his office during the hearings to plead his case. Before he opened his mouth, Weicker went ballistic and a shaken Colson fled the office. The run-in made headlines.

Like no other member of the committee, Weicker was prepared. Before the panel was even formally announced, Weicker had formed his own investigative unit that interviewed scores of former and current White House employees and campaign officials. Weicker was astutely aware that there were bigger culprits out there than G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord. He zeroed in on Nixon's chief-of-staff Bob Haldeman.

Weicker's five-man team put in 16-hour days, and by April they found enough evidence so that the senator could confidently drop two bombs. First he called a press conference and implied his fellow senators were wasting resources concentrating on pawns like Liddy and McCord—which was precisely what the White House wanted—and overlooking bigger fish like Haldeman and former Attorney General John Mitchell who headed the Committee to Reelect the President (CREEP).

At a follow-up press conference, Weicker called for Haldeman's resignation since he supervised the people who planned and attempted to cover-up the Watergate break-in. Weicker was blasted by his fellow senators for speaking out of turn, but Weicker had achieved his goal in upping the ante of the investigation.

Backbiting and backstabbing by both the majority and minority staffs, the seven senators and two chief counsels—the egomaniacal Sam Dash and the duplicitous Fred Thompson—were pulling the committee apart. Democratic staffers did not want to share information with their minority colleagues. Democratic senators distrusted the Republicans and Republican senators distrusted the Democrats and everyone was wary of Weicker's "maverick" impulses.

The most incorrigible partisans were Senator Baker and the hand-picked Thompson, a 30-year-old Tennessee lawyer with an Edward G. Robinson scowl who had served as Baker's 1972 senatorial campaign manager. Baker later described Thompson to President Nixon as a "Tennessee lawyer with brass balls." Their mission was to make things easier for the White House whenever possible, leak pro-White House stories and fight the immunity process for anti-administration witnesses.

Baker was not very popular with the majority staff or Weicker's office. If Gurney was straightforward about his partisanship, Baker was slippery. On one occasion, Baker, Gurney and Weicker met in a small chamber off the Senate floor to discuss the feasibility of getting in touch with the White House. They decided that if they did contact Nixon's people, they should be entirely open about it, and make no attempt to hide the content of any meeting that took place. But after further discussion, they agreed that contacting the White House would be a bad idea.

Baker went right out and met with Nixon anyway—and he

kept the meeting secret until pressured into disclosing it. He told the *Washington Post*'s Woodward and Bernstein three different stories. First, he denied ever having met with Nixon. Then he admitted having met with the president but claimed they had not discussed the Watergate hearings. Finally, he said that he had tried to persuade the president to waive executive privilege and allow his aides to testify. When Weicker angrily confronted Baker with the fact that he had broken the Minority pact, Baker offered no defense.

Baker, a master at parliamentary shell games, had a favorite trick. He would vehemently argue in behalf of the White House in committee executive sessions, assess which way the committee would vote, and then vote with the majority. He never got caught dissenting on a crucial vote. Baker would meet the press with Ervin, smile and nod, and announce that the vote was unanimous; never letting on that he had been engaged in a vicious battle within the rest of the committee.

The two-year route to Nixon's downfall began during the night of June 17, 1972, when five men were caught breaking into Larry O'Brien's office at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Hotel complex. In the beginning, the now famous Woodward and Bernstein of the *Washington Post* were the only reporters following-up on the break-in which White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler had labeled "a third-rate burglary." Most of the press played along with the White House. To give the *Washington Post* rare credit, it moved the story to a point where it could no longer be ignored, thanks to the leaks and leads of their "Deep Throat" source. It is interesting to note the inaction of most of the other so-called major media who today claim a share of the credit for bringing Nixon down.

Time magazine, following the break-in, carried some stories, but they were basically about money laundering. The *New York Times* virtually ignored Watergate from start to finish. Washington reporter Walter Rugabar pleaded with his Washington and New York editors to cover what he thought would turn out to be "the crime of the century," but the *Times* gave it third-rate coverage.

Newsweek was the next major publication to get into the act thanks to the talented Nicholas Horrock and John Lindsay. Once a week, they unloaded bombshell after bombshell. *Newsweek* continued to outdistance their competitors who had to play catch-up.

Once the hearings started on May 17, 1973, Muriel Dobbin of *The Baltimore Sun*, Harry Kelly of *The Chicago Tribune*, Frank Van Riper of *The New York Daily News*, Mike Putzel of the Associated Press and Dan Thomasson of Scripps-Howard, basically left Woodward and Bernstein in the lurch. Although the Bobsey Twins of journalism continued to cover the story, it was obvious their mysterious Deep Throat source had dried up and the *Washington Post* had to compete for leaks like every other news organization.

Following Watergate, America's journalism schools churned out thousands of ill-trained and ill-mannered Woodward and Bernstein clones with an edict to savage government under the guise of investigative reporting. While there are exceptions, most reporters are force-fed information, and the title "investigative reporter" is a misnomer. In truth, a good reporter has good sources; a great reporter has great sources.

Everybody on the Senate Watergate Committee leaked—from the senators to the committee staff to the lowest secretary. The lantern-jawed Thompson, who would later appear in countless movies and is now a U.S. senator from Tennessee, made a big deal early in the hearings about curbing committee leaks while he was feeding pro-Nixon stories to a naive Washington newcomer like

Connie Chung. The White House leaked around-the-clock.

But Weicker's office was a gold mine of information. At times, there were scores of reporters stumbling over each other outside the senator's office in the Old Senate office building, waiting for their daily handout. Most of the "exclusives" doled out were from the Weicker team's own investigation or background provided by Bill Shure, Weicker's man on the committee.

While the committee staff and the media hunted frantically for the "in-hiding" John Dean, Weicker's people not only found him and interviewed him but convinced the young counsel to the president to testify. Weicker became a bulldog on the committee after Dean revealed to him the extent of the president's involvement in the Watergate cover-up. It was the first time Nixon became a target of investigators. It was the first time the word "impeachment" appeared in columns and editorials.

While Weicker had daily meetings to buck up Ervin and propose immunity for key witnesses, he had already interviewed and battled the Baker/Thompson cabal and the staff was developing leads and interviewing sources under the senator's direction. The results: In addition to producing Dean, Weicker's office turned up the infamous Enemies List—the tape of the phone conversation in which John Ehrlichman described former FBI Director L. Patrick Gray as "twisting slowly, slowly in the wind"—and they brought to light domestic spying activities of the Justice Department's Internal Security Division.

They unearthed a memo on which Bob Haldeman had penciled "Good" and "Great" next to a sentence predicting that demonstrations at a Nixon rally would be "violent" and "obscene." And, they revealed "The Shotgun versus the Rifle" memo in which the White House staff proposed using various federal agencies, from the IRS to the Securities and Exchange Commission, to crack down on anyone, specifically the major networks and newspapers, that disagreed with them. The memo was a blockbuster. It enhanced the CBS career of then-Washington tyro Leslie Stahl and shattered shaky media support for the besieged president.

The first 37 days of the hearings produced bombshell after bombshell and, in retrospect, were the most productive of any congressional committee before or since in terms of mind-boggling revelations and riveting national attention on White House corruption. Then, in the middle of the hearings, Weicker's passion waned. He began to believe his press clippings. He would rather pontificate than investigate. He began to alienate certain members of the media who had ignored White House plants that the married Weicker was having an affair. Worse, he no longer sought advice from his staff and the investigative team dissembled. While he never missed a committee hearing, he appeared at times disinterested. Watergate's White Knight was riding into the sunset.

It was a typical Weicker performance. As a legislator in Hartford, a U.S. congressman, three-term senator and later governor of Connecticut; he could be dazzling in his zeal for an issue or a cause. He would become immersed in facts, put in bone-breaking long hours and think and articulate clearly. And suddenly, he could become bored and boring, tired, irascible and egomaniacal. Like a little kid, he did his homework one day and played hooky the next,

Still, he did a yeoman job on the Watergate Committee. Only the appearance of Alexander Butterfield, who testified about the White House taping system, had an impact like the steady stream of damning revelations from Weicker's office about the nefarious dealings of Mitchell, Magruder, Colson, Rebozo, Sloan, Liddy, Ehrlichman, Kleinestein, Haldeman and the rest of the Watergate



This photo shows the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., as seen in this 1972 courtroom evidence photo that was used 30 years ago to illustrate the proximity of the Howard Johnson Hotel (lower left) and the Watergate (right). Burglars used eavesdropping bugs to listen in on the Democratic National Committee with offices in the Watergate, setting up shop in the nearby Howard Johnson Hotel, and were caught in the act with the scandal leading up to the resignation of then-President Richard Nixon.

cast. Weicker single-handedly moved the committee forward and Ervin, the constitutional scholar who agonized over taking the chairmanship, became a national folk hero.

Weicker was the first Republican to blow the whistle on the Watergate cover-up; the first to denounce White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman; the first and only senator to vote for open Watergate hearings; the first to interview White House counsel John Dean; the first to demand that the IRS audit President Nixon's income taxes; the first to submit direct questions to the president about his role in the cover-up and the first to demand the reversal of the incomprehensible agreement between Senators Baker and Ervin and President Nixon to let aged and infirm Senator John Stennis audit the White House tapes.

The networks replayed and replayed the tape of the hearing room crowd erupting in the longest and loudest applause of the televised proceedings after Weicker declared: "Let me make it clear. Republicans do not cover-up; Republicans do not go ahead and threaten; Republicans do not go ahead and commit illegal acts; and God knows Republicans don't view their fellow Americans as ene-

mies to be harassed but rather, I can assure you, that this Republican, and those that I serve with, look upon every American as human beings to be loved and wanted."

The committee's 1,250 page Report on Presidential Campaign Activities, issued on June 27, 1974, covered seven volumes. Weicker also wrote an independent summation. Forty administration officials eventually were indicted and a president resigned. Along the way, even Howard Baker knew the president had lied to him. His belated "what did he (the president) know and when did he know it" is now part of the national lexicon.

The Senate Watergate Committee presented the American public with the cancer that corrupted the president and his men. These daily episodes provided a litany of corruption undreamed of in the annals of American politics, replacing soap operas on daytime television and turning millions of housewives into political analysts. Whatever their motives, passions, talents—or lack thereof—men like Erwin, Baker, Weicker, Talmadge, Inouye, Gurney and Montoya bought time for the Jaworskis and the Siricas to conduct their own investigations. Once the Watergate grand jury's secret report was turned over to the House Judiciary Committee, impeachment was only a matter of time.

When the web of deceit began to unravel, Nixon panicked, shifting the blame onto his various generals. Richard Nixon was not driven from office by cabals.

The CIA did not set out to cripple his presidency. The bureaucracy did not connive to immobilize the White House. There were no secret armies of political enemies; no armed divisions of Democrats lying siege to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The media, despite breast-beating, merely moved the story along, fed by a daily diet of leaks.

On August 8, 1974, with his support in the Senate reduced to about a dozen and his popularity polls below 30 percent, Nixon announced on television that he would resign at noon the next day.

Nixon's political death was by his own hand. "If you're not one of us, you're against us," was the credo of the Nixon administration. The predominately young button-down, blue-shirted legions who marched on Washington with Nixon took up their positions like conquerors. They entered the unreal, perquisite-laden realm of the White House, surrounded on all sides by black iron fence and security devices and were filled with contempt for anyone outside that fence. And they got drunk on power—the power to threaten, to coerce, to dominate. They never considered using that immense power to convince, to sway, to compromise.

Political opposites were not partners in negotiation but objects of retribution. And like the old adage, absolute power did indeed corrupt. Safeguarded from reality, Nixon and his troops became prisoners in the isolated splendor of the White House.

The members of the committee, specifically Weicker, were not immune from White House skullduggery. Blatantly untrue rumors were planted by Colson and others that Weicker was switching to the Democratic Party; that the senator's daughter had been arrested on drug charges (Weicker did not have a daughter); that the senator was having multiple affairs and that his 1970 senatorial campaign was rife with illegal and unethical financial practices. Weicker was even tailed by White House operative Tony Ulasewicz. The White House also tried to dig up dirt on the squeaky-clean Ervin.

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For all his liberal bluster, Senator (and later, governor of Connecticut) Lowell P. Weicker was one of the major figures on Capitol Hill fighting against Nixon's abuses of power. In fact, the former Connecticut governor and senator was one of the first to refuse to be taken in by Nixon's excuses and denials. The Watergate hearings would not have gone as they did without his input. Above, Weicker tours the Holy Land.

But nothing worked.

The Nixon Administration flagrantly and systematically violated constitutional rights, subverted the electoral process through illegal fund-raising and campaign sabotage, abused the federal bureaucratic machinery and willfully obstructed justice.

It failed because seven men did their jobs. Watergate was Richard Nixon's worse nightmare. It was Lowell Weicker's finest hour.

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