

Chapter 39 – Watergate and Pardongate: The 1974 Election

The pardon of ex-Pres. Richard Nixon by Pres. Gerald Ford did not determine the results of the 1974 mid-term elections, but it did determine the future of Ford, immediate and distant. Ford went from being a breath of fresh air in the White House, “the most normal, sane, down-to-earth individual to work in the Oval Office since Harry Truman left,” wrote David Broder in *The Washington Post*, to a part in the Watergate scandal himself. From being widely sought as a campaigner for Republican candidates for the House when Vice President to being, at best, “little help to his party” “with his Administration’s highlights to that point consisting of Nixon’s pardon, a proposed tax hike, and WIN buttons.” The tax increase and the Whip Inflation Now campaign sought to address the same problem through both reduction of the Federal budget deficit and consumer self-denial. More critically, Ford’s approval rating dropped twenty points in a week after the pardon. The congressional District that he left in Michigan to take the vice presidency elected a Democrat for the first time in 64 years.¹

Inflation and recession, as well as Watergate, drove the midterms, which gave House Democrats 48 more seats than they filled after the 1972 elections and two-thirds of all the seats in the body.² They even picked up seven seats in the South, but the big wins were in the five East North Central states with an increase of sixteen and the five Middle Atlantic states with eleven. Thanks to the big wins in the North, the Southern proportion of Democratic seats dropped to 28%. As recently as the 1960 election it was 38%.

Political analyst Michael Barone observed, “Nixon’s debacle prompted the candidacy of dozens of smart, aggressive, politically adept Democratic candidates and dissuaded almost all such Republicans from running.”³ Watergate also dissuaded the electorate from voting. The turnout in House elections dropped four percent from the previous midterm. While Democratic votes went up five percent, Republican ballots went down six percent. It is possible that many Republican voters simply stayed home.

No non-incumbent member of the Class of ’46 sought to return to the House in 1974, as in 1972 and 1966. The only remaining Republican incumbent in the Class fought the partisan headwinds to attempt to remain, but three of the nine Democrats chose to retire from the House.

Glenn Davis of Wisconsin was defeated by Robert Kasten in the Republican primary by fourteen points. On April 5 the Ninth District Republican Convention had endorsed Davis over Kasten 248 to 97. In the primary on September 10, Davis lost even his home county, which cast half the District’s vote. Between those two dates, Nixon resigned the presidency and Ford issued his pardon, the latter two days before the primary.⁴

Davis’s biographer would write, “The pardon is the obvious culprit,” the opinion also of the Representative’s administrative assistant. But Kasten supported Ford’s pardon of Nixon, and Davis had criticized Nixon’s reported tax evasion early on. That criticism was thought by some to have ended Davis’s quest for a Federal judgeship, which he had pursued since 1971 and which he only renounced in April 1974. The American Bar Association’s finding him unqualified for appointment and the persistent

¹ DeFrank, 27-8, 44. Brinkley, 79. Greene, 55, and Perlstein, 284, give varying figures of Ford’s approval rating but similar in their impact.

² Busch, 110.

³ Barone, 521.

⁴ *Waukesha Freeman*, August 31, September 11, 1974. *CQWR*, August 31, 1974, 2375.

insistence of some in Milwaukee's Jewish community that Davis was antisemitic were also negatives against his continued electoral success. As far as issue differences between the candidates, Kasten emphasized Davis' criticism by environmental groups. Beyond that there was little. Kasten, 32, was from a "distinguished Milwaukee banking family," with strong ties to well-heeled backers but only a recent politico, having first run for office in 1972 for his State Senate seat.⁵

A recurring speculation resulting from Wisconsin's open primary system is to what extent Democratic voters may have taken an opportunity to rid the District of a long-term antagonist. A more likely explanation is that too many of Davis' Republican voters did not bother to show up. Primary turnout was only 72% of that in 1972. Kasten would remain in the House until an unsuccessful run for Governor in 1978, then two years later would be elected to the US Senate for two terms.

For Robert Jones of Alabama the election was an uncontested slam dunk with no opposition in the primary or in November. He faced weak opposition for the nomination and election in 1972 but had not had a pass in November in ten years. Joe Evins of Tennessee also faced no opponent in the primary or general election. No one had challenged for the nomination since 1964, but there was an opponent on the election ballot every time since, also 1964. None of these really threatened, but a total pass allowed Evins to campaign for fellow House member Ray Blanton, who was running for Governor of the State.⁶

Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma continued his march to a long long tenure in 1974. The minor opponents to renomination continued, but no one challenged in November. Peryle Eastwood, 50, an insurance man, was a new contender in the primary, while rancher Marvin Andrews made his third consecutive run as well as his race to lower his vote share from 20% in 1970 to 14% in 1972 to 12% in 1974. Eastwood took 6%.⁷

Otto Passman in Louisiana had never faced a November opponent, though Republican Ross Shirah, a journalist and sales promotion copywriter, promised to do so in 1974. Shirah's balloon popped as soon as he released it and he withdrew, but Passman drew his fifth opposition in a row for nomination. Demp Allen, 46, a farmer, whose previous political experience was a challenge to the renomination of Sen. Allen Ellender in 1972, announced a campaign for a term limit on representatives, the abolition of the seniority system, the development of the District, and the elimination of tax loopholes for the very rich. Allen received 11% in the statewide race two years before, which would have been more of an accomplishment for a novice had Sen. Ellender not died 23 days before the primary. There remained a significant minority of opposition among primary voters to Passman. Allen took 25% of the vote, not scary perhaps to the incumbent and less than his opponents for nomination since 1966, but also not evidence of overwhelming support for the Representative from his voting constituents.⁸

While the other members of the Class of '46 were able to settle into districts that were, with the exception of Jones', reshuffled through the court rulings of the 1960s and the census of 1970, Olin Teague and Omar Burleson of Texas could not. Texas was allowed to use the districts in 1972 that the Supreme

⁵ Kevin Smith, 293-300, 344. *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 18, 1974. *The La Crosse Tribune*, August 5, 1973; September 9, 1974. *CQWR*, July 27, 1974, 1956. *Waukesha Freeman*, November 6, 1974.

⁶ *Nashville Tennessean*, October 14, 1974.

⁷ *The Lawton Constitution*, July 10, 1974. *CQWR*, August 31, 1974, 2380.

⁸ *CQWR*, August 24, 1974, 2302; October 12, 1974, 2754. *The Alexandria Daily Town Talk*, July 15, October 12, 1974. *The Monroe News-Star*, May 29, October 29, 1974. *The Shreveport Times*, July 12, 1974.

Court had declared unconstitutional, but the appellate panel the case was remanded to in Texas adopted a new plan on its own that it ordered for use in 1974.⁹

Teague's district was changed a little in the Dallas and Fort Worth areas, and part of Parker County to the west of Fort Worth was added. The number of new constituents was relatively small and the character of the District did not change appreciably. For the fifth time in a row, he faced no opposition in the primary. In the general election he drew the same Republican as in 1972, a self-employed writer of economic pamphlets. Carl Nigliazzo's take dropped ten points in a Democratic year.

The redistricting had a bigger impact on Burleson's district, but still a small one. The number of new constituents was nine percent of the total. It shifted him a little more into the Fort Worth area as he received the part of Parker County that Teague did not. For the first time, he and Teague were in adjacent districts. The safety of Burleson's District for him did not change. For the fourth time in a row, there was no primary challenger and for the fifth time in a row no general election opponent.

Democrat Harold Donohue of Massachusetts had a heart scare in 1971, but was described in December 1974 as "still going strong" though "[h]is hair is white now and the sharp blue eyes are a bit faded and he doesn't hear quite as well as before." He was 73 on June 18. Sure, he took only 54% against a Republican in 1970 and his close friend and district neighbor Phil Philbin lost his primary that year, but 1972 brought no opponents for either nomination or election. In 1974 Massachusetts legislators and a Holy Cross professor were testing the waters for runs in the primary and election. That was not new, but 27 days before his birthday the Worcester paper printed an interview with the Representative, who said he would retire to his law practice and his "long-delayed vacation plans."¹⁰

Minnesotan John Blatnik's heart problems were more severe than Donohue's. On February 11, 1974, he announced his retirement from the House. He was 62 at the time and cited his health issues, saying he could not do justice to his chairship of the Committee on Public Works. His only pass in November was in 1966, when he last lacked primary opposition as well, but that opposition topped at 31% in 1968. Blatnik actively backed Jim Oberstar, his administrative assistant for the previous twelve years, as his successor in the primary and election. Oberstar won the primary easily over Tony Perpich from a clan that was long in-Party nemeses of Blatnik. Oberstar would fill the seat until his defeat in 2010.¹¹

Bryan Dorn's plan had been to be the governor of South Carolina at age 30 after four years in the House, then spend the rest of his political career in the Senate, where he could orate as long as he wished. World War II got in the way and at age 30 he was first elected to the House. "I never intended to stay in Congress for 26 years if I could avoid it." "I've never had any desire to go back to the House," he would say in 1984. Over the years he cast his eyes on races for the Senate or for governor, but it was not until 1973, when he was 57 that he decided to go all in.¹²

A gubernatorial election was coming in 1974, the incumbent was term-limited, and the heir apparent Lt. Gov. Earle Morris had divorced his wife and married a 24-year-old. On November 19, 1973, Dorn announced for governor, the first Democrat to do so. Maurice Bessinger, who headed segregationist George Wallace's 1968 presidential campaign in South Carolina, joined the race in January. The contest

⁹ CQWR, February 19, 1972, 364. *White v. Weiser*.

¹⁰ *The Sun* (Lowell), September 26, 1973; December 29, 1974. *The Berkshire Eagle*, May 24, 1974. *Fitchburg Sentinel*, April 26, 1973. CQWR, February 23, 1974, 415.

¹¹ CQWR, February 16, 1974, 358; October 12, 1974, 2765. *The Daily Journal* (Fergus Falls), February 11, May 13, 1974. *The Winona Daily News*, September 11, 1974.

¹² Dorn and Derks, 6. *The Index-Journal*, November 11, 1984.

for the nomination seemed set, with a tarnished moderate Morris, a conservative Dorn, and a white-supremacist Bessinger vying in an old-style county-seat by county-seat campaign. Then came the disrupter. In March, Charles "Pug" Ravenel, an investment banker, who moved back to Charleston in 1972 from New York, threw his hat in as a "modernizer." Three other candidates filed at the last minute.¹³

Decrying the backwardness of South Carolina public education, and thus attacking the existing political elites such as Morris and Dorn, Ravenel ploughed wealth into a campaign that upset the status quo, more from his reliance on a media campaign than from his issues. Morris looked like a banker, Bessinger looked like the restaurateur he was, Dorn looked like a good old boy, and Ravenel, 36, looked rich.¹⁴

Ravenel had a major problem, however, in not having actually lived in the State for the five years the State Constitution required for a legitimate candidacy. Nevertheless, he got a favorable ruling from the State Attorney General and, with the three other major candidates trying to figure out how to appeal to 200,000 black voters they had opposed and then ignored, marched to a first-place finish in the primary. His 33.6% topped Dorn's 33.1%, Morris' 25.2%, and Bessinger's 2.5%.¹⁵

Ravenel and Dorn were in a run-off, with the outcome apparently predetermined. Dorn, who had been elected to the State House of Representatives in 1938, was unlikely to prevail against the new wave. A week before the runoff, in the first of a series of debates, the critical difference between the candidates was evident from their comments. Dorn said, "The issue is crystal clear: whether you will be hood-winked, bamboozled, sandbagged or humbugged by slick Madison Avenue people from New York, or whether the people will elect one of their own to the governorship of this state." Ravenel said, "I believe the question is whether we will change or not change." On July 30, Ravenel took the nomination with 55% of the vote.¹⁶

Two months later the South Carolina Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Ravenel failed to meet the residency requirement and was ineligible for the governorship. A week after that, a special Democratic State Convention nominated Dorn as the gubernatorial candidate. Dorn may have seemed the obvious replacement, but it took three ballots in the Convention and, even then, Dorn won by a hair. Ravenel pursued a fruitless appeal through the Federal courts of the residency requirement. His supporters felt he was robbed, and the former candidate himself refused to campaign for Dorn, although saying he would vote for him. He had supported an alternative to Dorn in the Convention. The Republican candidate won but by only three points over Dorn. South Carolina elected its first Republican Governor since Reconstruction.¹⁷

Coverage of House races is often quite thin, while the news media gives much more emphasis to campaigns for governor. It is interesting to see how Dorn presented himself in 1974. He began the campaign by focusing on the economy, calling for better jobs, decrying inflation, advocating cutting the state sales tax on food and adding consumers to the state Milk Commission. A major objective was the creation of a second medical school in Columbia, which he said he as Chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs could facilitate. Of course, he needed to defend himself as a Federal representative by attacking

¹³ CQWR, November 24, 1973, 3082; February 23, 1974, 432; July 6, 1974, 1745. "Biographical Note," Dorn Papers. Dorn & Derks, 258. *Florence Morning News*, March 26, July 15, 1974. *Aiken Standard*, April 12, 1974. Of the last seven men elected lieutenant governor in South Carolina, six became governor. Earle Morris's marriage to a younger woman may not have been a major concern in the State. After all, Sen. Strom Thurmond married a 22-year-old in 1968 when he was 66, but then his first wife had died and not been divorced by the Senator.

¹⁴ *The Index-Journal*, July 1 & 12, 1974.

¹⁵ CQWR, July 6, 1974, 1745. *Florence Morning News*, July 14, 1974. *The Index-Journal*, July 24, 1974.

¹⁶ *The Index-Journal*, July 24, 1974.

¹⁷ *The Index-Journal*, September 24 & 30, October 1 & 4 & 21, 1974. CQWR, October 12, 1974, 2799-800.

Washington. But he took credit for Federal aid to education and veterans benefits. Ravenel emphasized education and Dorn responded with advocating a raise in teachers' pay, the hiring of more guidance counselors and aides, and State certification of teachers, while saying these needed to be paid for without raising property taxes, but without saying how. Except for the medical school, the Milk Commission, and a list of unfunded educational initiatives, he was thin on new programs, even saying there should be a moratorium on such efforts. On Watergate, he decried it but refused to pillory Nixon, even as he linked the Republican candidate for governor to it. While being the only major Democratic candidate to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, he advocated the elimination of the death penalty except for the murder of police officers. He continued his support for school busing and hired a black equal-rights pioneer as a campaign aide, but it seems Ravenel had taken the bulk of the black vote. As far as defining himself philosophically, Dorn preferred not to, but labeled his Republican opponent as "ultra-conservative." By self-definition, Dorn was a farmer. The conclusion of the press was, "Dorn's campaign style folksiness and a less-than-serious attitude contrasted sharply with the direct but easy and good-humored approach [Republican James] Edwards used. Edwards was more conscious of how to look good on television than was Dorn." A candidate who cut his political teeth in 1938 was defeated by one whose first run for office was in 1971, though the age difference was only eleven years.¹⁸

The 109 members of the Class of '46 were down to six incumbents after the 1974 elections, and all were Southern Democrats plus Carl Albert from Little Dixie of Oklahoma. The elimination of the last Republican of the original 71 is a good point at which to ask, what happened? Why did 71 become zero, while 37 Democrats became six?

The most obvious answer is that so many of the Republicans elected in the banner year of 1946 were swept in by a wave that overcame the more Democratic inclinations of their districts, while the Democrats elected in that year were from solidly Democratic constituencies. Once the wave receded, many of the Republicans were pulled out to sea with it, while the Democrats remained. Of the 71 Republicans, 39 replaced Democratic representatives and were themselves replaced by Democrats. Of the 37 Democrats, 34 replaced Democrats.

Even with that explanation, 38 of the Republicans did not lose reelection in 1948, one more than the 37 Democrats, none of whom were defeated for reelection that year.

(Before making any more comparisons between Republican and Democratic longevity, it should be noted that six of the Republicans, who were washed out to sea in 1948, paddled back to the House. Four returned in 1950 and one in 1952. All were defeated by Democrats all over again. Horace Seely-Brown returned in 1950 and again in 1960 before giving up on the House in a run for the Senate.)

Democrats in the Class of '46 were disproportionately Southern, 23 of the 37, and somewhat by definition in secure districts for Democrats. Another 9 were from Border States and nearly as secure. Two of the Northern Democrats came from reliably Democratic districts, while John Blatnik of Minnesota, John Carroll of Colorado, and Harold Donohue of Massachusetts replaced Republican representatives.

The initial departures from the House of the members of the Class who had not been defeated in 1948 were as follows:

¹⁸ *The Index-Journal*, June 8 & 11 & 12 & 13 & 21 & 28 & 29, July 3 & 25 & 27, October 10 & 12 & 28, November 6, 1974. *Florence Morning News*, May 7, 1974. *Aiken Standard*, July 11, September 30, 1974.

	Death	Higher office	Retirement	Not renom.	Not reelected
Republicans 38	3	9	12	4	10
Democrats 37	2	9	14	11	1

The only big difference is in renominations and reelections, but these nearly balanced each other out. Whether defeated in the primary or in November, the individual still does not continue. Thus, 14 Republicans and 12 Democrats lost, not much of a difference. Yes, ten Republican seats by definition became Democrat seats while only one Democratic seat went Republican. This makes a difference in which party runs the House, but not in the continuation of the individual members of the Class.

This table does not take into account returns. Seven Republicans and two Democrats who lost or gave up their seats returned later to the House, and one of the Republicans returned twice. Yet in 1974, there were no Republican members in the House and six Democrats.

With a little math we can demonstrate there should be more Republicans. Two fewer retirements plus six more returns minus one more death and two more defeats equals five more Republicans than Democrats, yet there were six more Democrats.

The difference was in retirements. The median number of years served by a retiring Republican was 8.5. For a Democrat it was 26.5, a difference of 18 years. This was not a factor of age. The median age of the retiring Republican was 56.5, of the Democrat 64.5, a difference of 8 years.¹⁹

To put it bluntly, Republicans did not care to serve in the House as much as Democrats did. Since they were in the minority during this period except for two terms, why would they? Their status was lower and their influence on legislation was less than that of Democrats. If they stayed long enough, they still would not get to chair a committee, much less determine the business of the body as the Majority Leader did. Even when Republican presidential candidates won big, as Eisenhower had in 1956 and Nixon even more so in 1972, they did not become the majority in the House. The Republican delegation had settled into permanent minority.

And being in the minority determined that the Republican Party would remain in the minority. It was harder to attract quality candidates and difficult to retain superior legislators when the promise was that of relative insignificance. And, thus, it was harder to become the majority party.

Members of the Class of '46 who did not return to the House after 1974:

John Blatnik interacted with a variety of issues over his fourteen terms. He was an anti-Cold Warrior and an anti-Dixiecrat. The St. Lawrence Seaway was a major concern, directly affecting his district, but his reach was broader, focusing on the impact of smoking on health, advertising of pharmaceuticals, Medicare, the use of public works to strengthen the economy, and, especially, environmental concerns. Reaching the chairship of Public Works in his last two terms, his enacted public bills and resolutions often were related to that. His 20 public laws (out of 558 introduced) addressed the St. Lawrence Seaway (three), public works and the economy (two), rivers and harbors, flood relief, dam inspections, sales of canals, a congress on navigation, Great Lakes vessels, water pollution, food additives, and local matters (seven). His ten enacted resolutions (out of 105 introduced) covered Public Works committee work (eight), Leif Erickson Day, and a eulogy. Participating on the floor 678 times, he moved 17 amendments;

¹⁹ The seeking of higher office, while a voluntary departure from the House as is retirement, is a different matter. One tends to go for political advancement when younger and less tenured, especially in the case of the majority party. Democrats made the try at a median age of 42 and Republicans at 47, each group after only six years in the House.

the eleven accepted addressed rivers and harbors (three), water pollution (two), public works and the economy, the highway program, stand-by authority for the president, drug advertising, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and Lake Michigan. Six of his private bills became law. In key votes, Blatnik was with Democrats 479 times (289 only with Northerners, 26 with Southerners), Republicans five times, and missed a substantial 66 votes, many in his last two terms as he failed physically. His voting was the least Southern Democrat of the Democrats. He voted contrarily eleven times: opposed to aid for Greece and Turkey, to the draft, to the Wood Anti-Subversive Bill, to the Eisenhower Doctrine, to the House Un-American Activities Committee, to outlawing travel to incite a riot, to widespread wiretapping, to supporting Nixon on Vietnam, and to repealing the oleo tax, and for setting standards for TV and radio commercials and for Food for Peace for countries, even if they traded with North Vietnam. In rated voting he was not the most liberal Northern Democrat, but right in the middle of the five.

Glenn Davis had a hiatus in the House of four terms and came initially in a special election; so, served a bit less than ten terms. He was an opponent of pork barrel projects and concerned with military construction, flood control projects, and the District of Columbia. Two of his four enacted public bills (out of 105 introduced) were appropriations for Army civil functions, another with the Lighthouse Service, and the fourth was purely local. None of his 23 resolutions were enacted. Four of his 38 private bills were. He spoke 386 times and moved 32 amendments, five being accepted. They addressed funding for the Department of the Treasury and for the Niagara power project, the Defense Production Act, military pay, and rent supplements. Davis voted 349 times with Republicans, 41 with Democrats (19 with Northerners, 17 with Southerners), and missed 23 votes. He was a little more contrary than Blatnik. His twelve votes opposed the repeal of the oleo tax, the draft, two increases for pensions for veterans with non-service connected disabilities, the Mutual Security Program, the Colorado River project, an increase in educational funding, coal mine safety, a windfall tax on the oil industry, and funding public service jobs and the extension of unemployment benefits, and to support military aid for Turkey and transition funds for ex-Pres. Nixon. His rated voting was much on the conservative side of the Class Republican center.

Harold Donohue was participatory – 738 events – but lowly productive, at least publicly. He introduced the articles of impeachment of Richard Nixon, and he was instrumental in ensuring the Bicentennial celebrations, which were responsible for one of his four public laws and one of four enacted resolutions. The other public bills out of 592 introduced dealt with court procedures, Alaska judges, and a local matter. The other resolutions out of 129 introduced covered customs, a Robert Goddard memorial, and the anniversary of Hopkinton. Of 174 private bills, 22 were enacted, which ties him with Kenneth Keating and only one behind Abraham Multer. He moved only three amendments on the floor; two dealt with private bills and one with military medical care. Donohue voted 514 times with Democrats (290 with Northerners and 50 with Southerners), 20 times with Republicans, and missed 26 votes. His only contrary vote was to oppose outlawing travel to incite a riot. Though he shifted to the left over his terms of office, he was the most conservative Northern Democrat in the Class, which would still be more liberal than the most liberal Southern Democrat.

Bryan Dorn's political career did not take him where he wanted to go, nor did his House service. He was a segregationist and a supporter of the textile industry, the Vietnamese War, and veterans. His lengthy service on Veterans' Affairs, ending as the chair in his last term, did not bear public fruit. Of his six enacted public bills out of 512 introduced, only two dealt with veterans. Another concerned the Marine Corps reserve, another Department of Agriculture land titles, and two were local. Six of his enacted resolutions out of 101 introduced were Committee on Veterans' Affairs grunt work. Another did address veterans and the sixth was a private matter. Of 18 private bills, three became law. He was active, speaking

1202 times and moving ten amendments. Seven were accepted, four on veterans, one on agricultural research, one on educational funding, and one on national cemeteries. Dorn voted 418 times with Democrats (285 with Southerners alone, 30 with Northerners), 66 times with Republicans, and missed 30 votes. His contrariness count was the same as Donohue's; he opposed the Wolcott Anti-Inflation Bill, Interim Foreign Aid, the Marshall Plan, the Mutual Security Program, reciprocal trade extensions, the national highway program with new taxes, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Trade Agreements Extension Act, a salary increase for federal employees, the Peace Corps, and the presidential continuity amendment, and supported restricting the Equal Rights Amendment. He was tied for third most conservative among the Class's Southern Democrats.