

Republican Perspective

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Misplaced Confidence

After World War II, our country became locked into a life-or-death struggle (which would last for more than four decades) with the Soviet block.

In 1950 General Douglas MacArthur, then overseeing the occupation of Japan, was reassigned to lead us in the Korean War, and in 1951 he got into a head-butting contest with his Commander-in-Chief, President Harry Truman. Truman fired MacArthur and the country went into an uproar. My parents were firmly in MacArthur's camp----and thought he should run for the presidency. But MacArthur was a controversial and imperious figure, his early strength faded, and his run did not materialize.

In 1952 our country had had 20 consecutive years of Democrat rule in the White House. President Truman was wildly unpopular and smart enough not to run for re-election.

In contrast to MacArthur, retired five-star General Dwight Eisenhower was a genial and non-controversial character. He was wooed by both political parties to run for the presidency and he chose to run as a Republican. Many Republicans (my parents included) favored the more conservative choice----Senator Robert Taft. But Ike was unbeatable and he got the nomination.

As a counterweight to his lack of credibility with the party's conservative core, he took as his running mate Senator Richard Nixon, considered to be a conservative stalwart. Everybody liked Ike. He and Nixon won by a landslide against the Democrats' sacrificial candidate in 1952 and again in 1956.

Nixon was narrowly defeated for election to the presidency in 1960, and then for the California governorship in 1962. He declared "you won't have Nixon to kick around anymore" and withdrew from politics forever. Forever lasted six years.

By the mid-1960s my parents were living in a condo development on a bluff overlooking the ocean at San Clemente. Their perch also overlooked private-citizen Nixon's residential compound.

In 1968 Nixon arose from his political tomb to capture the presidency. From their cliff, my parents looked down at the "Western White House," as the press called the Nixon compound. My mom would delight in monitoring the compound's flagpole. If the flag was flying, Nixon was in residence; if not, he

wasn't. Never mind that she could have learned Nixon's whereabouts from the TV or the newspaper----she knew first-hand.

One evening in May of 1972 Pop lay down to take a pre-dinner nap and never awoke. The Watergate burglary did not occur until June, and the related investigation was still beyond the horizon. Nixon was re-elected in a landslide, but within two years his presidency ended in disgrace.

A death can rarely be thought fortunate, and certainly Pop's was not. However, I believe there was at least a silver lining in the timing. He never saw the shame Nixon brought upon himself and upon the presidency itself----and the damage he did to the Republican Party. Pop died without learning that his confidence in Nixon had been misplaced, and with no inkling of the impending disgrace.