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Favorable Winds: Robert Morgan & The Circumstances of the 1974 Election Year

The election year of 1974 was fraught with drama and controversy, and it was not standard fare. While the predictable cycle of congressional midterms churned through their own campaign surprises, the entire nation was watching as President Richard Nixon faced impeachment in the middle of his term. The Watergate scandal, in which President Nixon was implicated, was too large to remain separate from the already ongoing congressional races. Whether politicians liked it or not, the 1974 midterms would act in some capacity as a referendum on Nixon's alleged involvement. As the scandal intensified and became more prominent, politicians would jockey to have the right opinion for their constituents. Amongst them, certain politicians would do better than others due to their background. Theoretically, this would be the time for a rule-of-law, anti-Nixon champion to capitalize on the Watergate scandal. Enter Robert Morgan, a North Carolina politician with a theoretically ideal background, party affiliation, and circumstance in which to capitalize on a perfect storm of an election-year controversy. This paper will seek to determine if Robert Morgan's successful North Carolina 1974 U.S. senatorial campaign was due in large part to the surrounding effects of Watergate. To accomplish such a determination, this paper will examine the effects of Watergate against other important campaign trends. Through this determination, the paper will ultimately argue that Watergate only played a tangential role in Morgan's victory and was not directly utilized.

Historiography

To what extent was Robert Morgan's 1974 victory effected by the Watergate Scandal? Scholars generally recognize that scandals work to determine the outcomes of elections.¹ While scandals might not always cause a decisive change in one way or another, they generally have the potential to change the electoral atmosphere. Julian Zelizer poses that "American history has been replete with scandal." and that politicians after the 1960s "readily engaged in scandal warfare."² That warfare was effective. In 2013, Scott J. Basinger found that over two hundred members of the House had been implicated in a scandal since Watergate.³ Of those implicated, roughly 40% were not elected back to their office.

Scholarship regarding scandal has long since moved on from merely justifying the relevance of scandal. Instead, scholarship tends to focus on the diversity of scandals and their varying impacts.⁴ For example, David Doherty, Conor Dowling, and Michael Miller ask a more minute question in their paper "Are Financial or Moral Scandals Worse? It Depends."⁵ By building off the extensive body of scandal scholarship, they can ask which specific types of scandals are worse than others. In the same vein, this paper will rely on the robust scholarship regarding scandal to address a minute question: were the 1974 midterms impacted by the Watergate

¹Alan I Abramowitz. "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes." *The American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (06, 1988): 385. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/explaining-senate-election-outcomes/docview/214436423/se-2>; David R. Dewberry, "The American Political Scandal: Free Speech, Public Discourse, and Democracy." Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central; Brandon Rottinghaus, "Surviving Scandal: The Institutional and Political Dynamics of National and State Executive Scandals", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47, no. 1 (2014): 131–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43284497>; Wioletta Dziuda, et al., "Political Scandal: A Theory." *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 1 (2021): 197–209. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45415621>.

² Julian E. Zelizer, "*Without Restraint: Scandal and Politics in America.*" in "The Columbia History of Post-World War II America" Ed, Mark Carnes (Columbia University Press, 2007.) 226-228.

³Scott J. Basinger "Scandals and Congressional Elections in the Post-Watergate Era." *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23563151>. 385-387

⁴ Michael A. Genovese, et al., "Watergate Remembered : The Legacy for American Politics." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵ David Doherty, et al., "Are Financial or Moral Scandals Worse? It Depends." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 749–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41319963>.

scandal? This question, which has its own scholarship, will be explored through the lens of Robert Morgan's Senate Race. As Robert Morgan's campaign would have been in the prime position to be influenced by the Watergate Scandal, analyzing his campaign will serve as a case study to understand Watergate's impact on the 74-midterm.

Scandal, however, is far from the only factor that affects an election and Robert Morgan's 1974 race was no different. In his 1988 article "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes." Alan I. Abramowitz asserted that a multitude of factors affect a Senate race.⁶ Through Abramowitz's analysis, the factors that make up candidate quality rang most true regarding Senate race influence.⁷ Though recent scholarship has found that factors such as candidate quality have been declining in potency since 1972, that decline has not been severe enough to ignore in the 1974 elections.⁸ These factors would be critical in a political landscape where a politician's individual integrity would be on the ballot. The midterm election of 1974 would see a massive reform movement sparked by the perceived lack of individual integrity in candidates and government.⁹

In addition to candidate quality, pre-existing party dynamics cannot be ignored. Though the 1974 Republican party certainly faced adversity from the Watergate scandal, that is not to say that they had been particularly well-off prior to it. Christopher J. Baily indicates that during the 1974 midterm elections, the Republican party in the Senate was still feeling the full effects of their virtual minority party status.¹⁰ For nearly two decades at that point, the Republicans had not had control over the Senate. The Republican Party would not enjoy senatorial control until

⁶ Abramowitz, "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes." 397-402

⁷ Ibid, 397.

⁸ Costas Panagopoulos. *Congressional Challengers: Candidate Quality in U. S. Elections to Congress*. (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), ProQuest Ebook Central. 119-122.

⁹ John A Lawrence, "The Class Of '74 : Congress after Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship." (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.)

¹⁰ Christopher J. Baily, "The Republican Party in the US Senate: 1974-1984: party change and institutional development" (New York: Manchester University Press, 1988). Pg. 1-12.

significant reforms had been made to the party. That progress would then only come to fruition during the 1980 election of Reagan. Until those “revival” reforms in the late 1970s, the Republican party would be at a disadvantage in senatorial elections.¹¹ Not only were senatorial trends plaguing the Republican party, but leadership was also an issue. Nixon, even before the Watergate Scandal, was not necessarily a good party leader. Robert Mason’s 2005 paper on the subject concludes that previous scholarship regarding Nixon’s Republican leadership was correct to conclude that he was ineffective at building a Republican majority.¹² These two factors, historical weakness and bad 1974 leadership, left the Republican party with theoretically little momentum to improve its hold on the Senate in 1974.

Between the looming factors of scandal and pre-existing electoral realities, 1974 was mired in uncertainty for the Republican party.¹³ Democrats, on the other hand, would have theoretically had the advantage. With an already weak opponent suffering a massive scandal at the highest level of their leadership, the 1974 election would seemingly be an easy midterm victory for Democrats; however, the Democrats still had their own issues to contend with. The two election cycles prior had been relative failures for the Democrats, and their future seemed uncertain. Watergate had allowed the Democratic Party to gain a temporary reprieve from Nixon’s pressure, but an underlying weakness within the party had already been revealed.¹⁴

Finally, are the issues of the time. During the 1974 midterms, the issue that simply could not be ignored was the economy.¹⁵ Between oil companies, international deals on grain trade,

¹¹ Ibid, 1-4

¹² Robert Mason. “‘I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority’: Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969-73.” *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2005): 463–83.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27557693>.

¹³ Baily, “The Republican Party in the US Senate: 1974-1984: party change and institutional development” 1-3. *Specifically referring to the attitudes of Republican senators and the party’s dismal feelings towards its future.*

¹⁴ John G. Stewart, “One Last Chance: The Democratic Party 1974-76” (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974) 9.

¹⁵ Genovese et al., *Watergate Remembered: The Legacy for American Politics*, 10-11.

general inflation, and cost of living, money was on the minds of the electorate and, therefore, on the minds of politicians.¹⁶

As this paper's primary objective is finding what effect the Watergate scandal had on Morgan's electoral outcome, determining what factors were most influential must be a primary objective. Seeing as scandal and electoral trends were both primary factors, this paper will examine them so that Morgan's campaign can be accurately utilized to answer the research question.

Section 1: 1972 - 1974

This paper's central argument depends upon the context of the 1972-1974 political climate. Practically all political campaigns are dependent on seasonal surprises, hot-button issues, and cultural zeitgeists. Midterm campaigns are, in a way, especially attuned to seasonal factors. It is commonly theorized that midterms are a referendum on the current president.¹⁷ Robert Morgan's campaign can then theoretically be used as a temperature taker for Nixon's presidency. After all, the dramatic Watergate scandal undeniably altered the opinions of Americans regarding their political process.¹⁸ Those Americans had the chance to vote in the 1974 midterms just three months after Nixon's resignation. It will therefore serve to understand 72-74's circumstances by exploring the fallout of Nixon's scandal. By understanding the fallout's effects, this paper can then establish how Robert Morgan was able to capitalize off the climate that Nixon's Watergate created.

¹⁶ Donald Ross, "American History & Culture: from the explorers to Cable TV", (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2000) 509-512.

¹⁷ John R Petrocik, et al., "The Midterm Referendum: The Importance of Attributions of Responsibility." *Political Behavior* 8, no. 3 (1986): 206–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/586080>; Edward R. Tufte "Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections." *The American Political Science Review* 69, no. 3 (1975): 812–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958391>.

¹⁸ McLeod, et al., "Watergate and the 1974 Congressional Elections." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1977): 181–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748335>; Genovese, et al., "Watergate Remembered: The Legacy for American Politics" page xi

The Watergate Scandal spanned from 1972 to late 1974. It began with the burglary of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters, and it would eventually end with the resignation and pardon of Richard Nixon. During that span of two years, Watergate ramped up from a budding intrigue to a sprawling political scandal.¹⁹ The public would learn of illegalities, cover-ups, and corruption through countless newspaper articles and television broadcasts. The American electorate's awareness of the scandal only increased as it went on. From the 1972 indictment of the burglars to the eventual 1973 senate hearings, awareness would increase from 52% to 98%.²⁰ That awareness was not shallow either. Americans proceeded to form opinions on Nixon due to the scandal and were hotly divided on the issue. In February of 1974, the *New York Times* reported on polling that showed 53% of Republicans still supported the president.²¹ However, that 53% was overshadowed by a historically low approval of 26% across the board. The controversy would continue to tear at Americans until the ordeal seemed to finally be over with the pardon of Nixon by Ford. However, even that issue saw Americans divided with a majority believing Ford's actions to be wrong.²² The move would inevitably damage Republicans and play well for Democrats.²³

Politicians, of course, would have their own internal struggles. As mentioned previously in this paper, Republicans in 1974 felt that the Nixon administration's scandal had damaged their already poor electoral viability for the midterm season.²⁴ Republican's hold on Congress had

¹⁹ Fred Emery, "Watergate" (New York: Times Books, 1994) xi

²⁰ Mcleod et al., "Watergate and the 1974 Congressional Elections" 181

²¹ "Nixon at New Low in Poll 26% Approve His Efforts." *New York Times*, February 3rd, 1974.

²² Louis Harris & Associates, Louis Harris & Associates Poll: September 1974, Question 1, USHARRIS.100774.R1, Louis Harris & Associates, (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1974), Survey question, DOI: 10.25940/ROPER-31107725.

²³ John A. Lawrence, "The Class Of '74 : Congress after Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship. 52

²⁴Baily, "The Republican Party in the US Senate: 1974-1984: party change and institutional development" 1-2; R. W. Apple Jr. "G.O.P. FACING LOSS OF 25 TO 43 SEATS IN VOTE FOR HOUSE" *New York Times*, November 4, 1974, 77. <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/04/archives/gop-facing-loss-of-25-to-45-seats-in-vote-for-house.html>.

been tenuous, and at the time of the Watergate scandal, their party had been a minority in the Senate for nearly a decade. Republicans understandably feared a referendum effect come the midterm season. As trust in government officials was already low, this scandal could theoretically lower it further for Republicans specifically. Worse still, congressional Republicans knew their torn voter base would be scrutinizing their decisions to support or oppose Nixon. Truly, the outlook was dire. At a certain point, morale dropped low enough that multiple Republican senators began to consider third-party options.²⁵

Democrats, on the other hand, had reason to be optimistic. If the Republicans could fear a referendum effect, the Democrats could hope for one. However, Democrats in 1974 had their own problems and the electoral effect of Nixon's scandal was yet unknown.²⁶ The Democrats had lost the presidency in 1968 and 1972. The party had been struggling to form an internal response to the politics that Nixon had brought to the table.²⁷ Perhaps most critically, Democrats would need to continue their reform efforts to combat the electorate's distrust of politicians. Though inter-party reform had been ongoing, the issue would only be amplified by the Watergate scandal.²⁸ Democrats needed to make sure that they did not drop the ball, even if the Watergate scandal did seem to be in their favor.

The distrust of politicians cannot be over-emphasized in its importance. For this paper, it is especially pertinent. The Watergate scandal, at its core, was about corruption and trust. The scandal confirmed the fears of Americans and justified the swelling desire for reform that had

²⁵ Baily, "The Republican Party in the US Senate: 1974-1984: party change and institutional development." 1-2.

²⁶ Jogn G. Stewart, "One Last Chance: The Democratic Party 1974-76" (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974) 184-185.

²⁷ Ibid, 9

²⁸ Ibid, 83

started in 1972.²⁹ Trust in government had already been on a downward trend since 1958.³⁰ This trend would unsurprisingly continue into the 1974 election season with a Roper poll finding that 49% of Americans were “not at all confident” in being able to generally depend on what government leaders say.³¹ 39% were “Only fairly confident” and only 8% were “very confident.” This poll, which was conducted only a month away from the 1974 midterm elections, provides an excellent understanding of a major source of improvement that politicians needed to make. It was not just Nixon’s integrity that would suffer. All politicians, Democrats and Republicans, would be forced to contend with an electorate whose distrust was reaching a boiling point.

The 1974 elections were thus set in a swamp of illegal activities, corruption, lies, and an absence of trust. Robert Morgan, a participant in those elections, was a candidate who understandably touted himself as virtuous. Regardless of the truth of Morgan’s virtue, he had the record to back up such a claim and wielded it readily. He was a lawman; someone concerned with doing things the right way. He would eventually win his bid for the U.S. Senate, successfully wading through the swamp that Watergate had imposed. The research question, then, comes back into focus. What effect did Watergate have on Morgan’s campaign? Did Robert Morgan succeed in his election because of Watergate? Was he capitalizing on the scandal and using it to win over voters? Was Morgan simply running a good campaign or winning for reasons tangential to the Watergate zeitgeist? Exploring Morgan’s background will aid in understanding his eventual navigation of Watergate during his campaign. By exploring his campaign, one will be able to understand exactly how that navigation occurred.

²⁹ Mark Carne, ed. “The Columbia History of Post-World War II America.” (New York: Columbia University Press), 2007. 236, 234

³⁰ Mcleod et al., “Watergate and the 1974 Congressional Elections” 184

³¹ The Roper Organization, Roper Reports Poll: President Ford/Inflation/Automobiles/Energy, Question 87, USROPER.74-9.R32D, The Roper Organization, (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1974), Survey question, DOI: 10.25940/ROPER-31097305.

Section 2: Morgan's Background – Principles & Quality

Robert Burren Morgan wore more than just one hat in his lifetime. He was a lawyer, state senator, attorney general, and eventually a United States senator. It is not hard to imagine the advantage that Morgan's experience in public service might have had on his senate campaign. Backgrounds like Morgan's are generally understood to lead to a strong candidate that has a high chance of winning elections.³² Before this paper examines Morgan's navigation of the Watergate scandal, it will serve to understand Morgan as an individual candidate. Only then can his platform be contextualized in the scope of Watergate.

The 1974 campaign-funded editorial piece "Robert Morgan- For the People" provides both a good summary of Morgan's background and an example of the image that Morgan wished to portray. According to the editorial, Robert Morgan was supposedly "pushed" into politics by his fellow Democrats. At 24 years old, his career started while he was still in law school where he was encouraged to run for clerk of superior court. From that point on, Morgan would continue his dual vocation of practicing law and holding political office. Morgan had created his own law practice which he maintained during his nearly 9-year stint as a state senator. The dual purpose of practicing law and politics would finally come to a head when he won the office of North Carolina attorney general. The attorney general's office "permitted him to combine his love for law and politics..."³³

The editorial provides a good perspective of Morgan's career and begins to illustrate the platform of his 1974 campaign. It hits on the highlights of his career and, most importantly, illustrates his ties to law and the attorney general's office. Morgan truly portrayed his time as AG

³² Abramowitz, "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes." 385-389

³³ "Robert Morgan - For The People." *The Democratic Team*, 1974, Folder D, Box 341, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

as a peak synergy in his legislative and judicial skills. It is then unsurprising that Morgan did not resign from the office of attorney general until August of 1974, only months away from the 74 elections. Morgan practically clung to his time as attorney general, using it to bolster his image as a lawman and tie himself back to a record that he clearly valued.

Up until now, this paper has mentioned Robert Morgan's attorney record. It has been a point of emphasis but has thus far received little explanation. Morgan clearly had his reasons for emphasizing it himself. At this point, it will be useful to underline what Morgan's attorney general record primarily consisted of. Then, we will be able to understand why this emphasis is warranted.

Morgan's campaign for attorney general would see many promises. Most of which he was able to accomplish. Morgan marketed himself as a rule-of-law champion who was ready to investigate criminal acts and terrorist activity.³⁴ He just as readily hoped to curb crime from happening in the first place with initiatives for prevention.³⁵ Morgan was also passionate about educating the public on laws, especially wanting young people to know the consequences of drinking while driving.³⁶ Morgan did end up accomplishing much in these fields, but they were not what would become his most valued achievements.³⁷

A year into office, Morgan had established a consumer protection division in the office of the attorney general. In 1969, he gave a speech outlining his appreciation for the system of free

³⁴ "Morgan In Attorney General Race; To War On Terrorists / Sen. Morgan Joins Race" *The Charlotte News*, January 24th, 1968, Folder A, Box 82, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

³⁵ Bill Chaze, "Morgan Asks Imaginative Crime Curbs." *The Charlotte News*, April 3rd, 1968, Folder A, Box 82, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

³⁶ Robert B. Morgan, "ON THE NEED FOR EDUCATING THE PEOPLE WITH REGARD TO LAW AND ORDER." Speech, Undated, Folder A, Box 83, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

³⁷ "Robert Morgan - For The People." *The Democratic Team*, 1974, Folder D, Box 341, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

enterprise which protected both the consumer and business owner. He railed against unfair business practices and monopolies. He propped up the attorney general's office as being the historic defender of these virtues. In this sense, he titled himself and his predecessors "the people's attorney."³⁸ For the rest of his time as attorney general, he would deliver on that ideal. Whether he was expanding regulatory powers or litigating the price of milk, Morgan would build himself a record of consumer protection and anti-trust. He was recognized nationally for his achievements in a conference on consumer protection, where he was able to summarize his achievements.³⁹ This lauding of achievements will not go away as Morgan begins to run for U.S. Senate. For now, though, Morgan's background and record has been firmly set. Before moving on to the next section of this paper, it will serve to briefly return to the "Robert Morgan- For the People" editorial.

Throughout the rest of the article, there are various explicit statements of Morgan's positions. Of note are the ones that tie into the themes that pervaded the 1970s. The position "That they want to believe in the integrity of government." is second on a list of his beliefs. Similarly, when speaking on his achievements as attorney general, Morgan leads the bulleted list with his establishment of a consumer protection division within the Department of Justice. These two themes, though mentioned casually enough in this editorial, will not go away. As mentioned, the topic of governmental integrity was critical in the early 1970s, and Morgan well knew it.⁴⁰ Just as relevant was Morgan's tie to his consumer protection record. This point would inevitably

³⁸ Robert B. Morgan, "NORTH CAROLINA'S HISTORIC ROLE IN PROTECTING THE CONSUMER." Speech, September 25th, 1969, Folder J, Box 83, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

³⁹ Robert B. Morgan, "THE STATES' ROLES IN CONSUMER PROTECTION." Speech. October 29th, 1971, Folder ZJ, Box 87, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁴⁰ Survey, June 1974, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, Folder C, Box 88, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC. *This citation refers specifically to page 13-17 of the interpretation section.*

tie into issues that voters were keenly invested in.⁴¹ Both of these issues will serve to answer the research question. By examining the extent to which Morgan's campaign harped on governmental integrity, his utilization of the Watergate scandal should become clear due to the two concepts being inexorably linked in 1974. Similarly, by examining Morgan's utilization of consumer trust, his commitment to issues that were relatively independent from the Watergate scandal can be used to determine independent success.

Governmental Integrity & Watergate as a platform

Morgan, like other politicians during the early 1970s, was well advised to take governmental trust seriously. He knew that the elections of 1972 had amplified worries about corrupt officials and money in politics.⁴² Morgan also knew from polls that loss of governmental faith was present in North Carolina just as it was nationally. Those polls informed him that the Watergate scandal had caused "Fallout on the whole system of politics... disclosure by candidates of both contributions and expenditures will be mandatory."⁴³ Morgan didn't waste time. In late February, near the start of his campaign, Morgan made sure to sign the "Code of Fair Campaign Practices" as part of a national bi-partisan effort.⁴⁴ Of course, Morgan publicized this in a press release. The same press release also assured voters that Morgan could not be bought by special interests and spoke of a local funding effort to publicly tie his funds to the electorate. In the same vein,

⁴¹ Ibid. Interpretation, 13-17

⁴² Robert B. Morgan, Speech, February 27th, 1974, Folder D, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Charles Winberry, Letter, Undated, Folder E, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

Morgan disclosed his personal finances roughly mid-way into the campaign, totaling up his financials for all the electorate to see.⁴⁵

Morgan's answer to the public's distrust of politicians and government was not a shallow effort of "mandatory" steps. Morgan made governmental integrity a large part of his platform. After signing the campaign practices code, Morgan stated that his campaign motto would be "The only good politics is clean politics." Perhaps most helpful to this aspect of Morgan's campaign was that his concern with government trust was not new. While running for attorney general in 1968, Morgan was giving speeches regarding "the President's credibility gap; congressional misbehavior and congress' failure to establish a code of ethics for its membership."⁴⁶ The speech danced from poetry to referencing Anglo-Saxon kings, all so he could hammer home the importance of fair elections with fair representation. Morgan was wholly unafraid in speeches like these to call for the restoration of faith in elections. What then would Morgan say about Nixon and Watergate? The epitome of unfair practices and corrupt officials had presented itself, and an election would seemingly be the time to take advantage of such an easy target.

Morgan, in a march 1974 news release, talked about the pervading issue of corruption and governmental distrust. However, when Morgan made an obligatory mention of Nixon and Watergate, he tip-toed around any direct criticism.⁴⁷ He weaved elegantly between the issues, citing them as symptoms of a lack of integrity in government, but never taking too direct of an

⁴⁵ Manuscript, April 11th, 1974, Folder A, Box 88, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

⁴⁶ Robert B. Morgan, "Youth and Political Action." Speech, March 7th, 1968, Folder I, Box 83, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

⁴⁷ "Special to the Weeklies." Manuscript, March 4th, 1974, Folder E, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

aim. Morgan instead focused on adjacent issues that the electorate were unhappy with such as oil prices, supply shortages, and cost of living.⁴⁸ Morgan simply attributed the national distrust of government to the entire lot of issues. His method of indirect accusation did not abate. When he spoke of Agnew's resignation, it was merely a footnote in the grander scheme of upheaval.⁴⁹ Morgan's mentions of Nixon and Watergate were measured. He either carefully regarded Watergate or simply ignored the scandal entirely. When he did finally take aim at Nixon, Morgan did not mention Watergate, he instead harped on his veteran policies.⁵⁰ Though the criticism is sharp and scathing, it is purely on a policy basis which avoids attacking the character of Nixon. Perhaps most illustrative of this trend is Morgan's statement regarding Nixon's pardon. The statement, which was not even a page long, provides a boilerplate and bland support of normal legal procedures which echoed his background as an attorney. The statement simply concludes, "I can only hope that the unilateral action of President Ford will not reopen the wounds of Watergate." Those wounds, seemingly, were something that Morgan never wanted to open himself.

Independent Issues and Tangential platforms:

Government integrity and Watergate were not the only issues on American minds in 1974.⁵¹ Morgan, knowing this, did not make governmental integrity and Watergate his only platforms. When he was not dancing around the subject of Nixon, he was running on his record

⁴⁸ Survey, June 1974, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, Folder C, Box 88, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁴⁹ Robert B. Morgan, "Robert Morgan Signs Fair Campaign Practices Pledge." Speech, February 26th?, 1974?, Folder D, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Morgan Papers.

⁵⁰ Manuscript, April 6th, 1974, Folder E, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁵¹ Louis Harris & Associates, Louis Harris & Associates Poll: November 1974, Question 58, USHARRIS.121274.R1, Louis Harris & Associates, (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1974), Survey question, DOI: 10.25940/ROPER-31107686.

as N.C. attorney general. In March, Morgan took advantage of his AG record during a speech in Fairmont. He spoke about the threat of white-collar crime on consumers and small businesses alike. He insisted that the government acted in a protective capacity to the would-be victims of such crimes.⁵² A month later, Morgan was tackling the issue of inflation. He lamented the rising cost of living and blamed anti-protectionist policies that he saw as hurting the consumer. More speeches like these would follow, always hitting on the economy and inflation, and conveniently tying back to Morgan's record as a friend of the consumer.⁵³ From early in the campaign to late, Morgan would never fail to run on his consumer protection record.

Morgan's consumer focus is illustrated clearly in his July 1974 speech, four months away from the election. Morgan was speaking to a group of businessmen that were part of the North Carolina Meat Packers Association. In his speech, Morgan firmly, directly, and passionately ties himself to the beliefs of free trade, consumer protection, and free enterprise. He goes out of his way in a relatively lengthy speech to explain to these businessmen how passionate he is about the subject. Morgan cites an example of a predatory tire advertisement which would trick consumers in the short term and hurt local business in the long term. He ties in governmental trust to the issue of inflation and wasteful spending, all meshing together with his record of protecting the finances of North Carolina's electorate. Here, Morgan is masterfully utilizing his consumer protection and anti-trust record while reminding the voter that he was the "people's attorney."⁵⁴

⁵² Manuscript, March 20th, 1974, Folder E, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers, Special Collections, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville NC.

⁵³ Manuscript, April 9th, 1974, Folder E, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers; Robert B. Morgan, Manuscript, September 24th, 1974, Folder A, Box 88, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁵⁴ Morgan, B. Robert. "CONSUMER PROTECTION AND FREE ENTERPRISE" Speech, July 27th, 1974, Folder ZJ, Box 87, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

At this point, Morgan's platform is becoming increasingly clear. He, as most politicians did at the time, had a vested interest in promoting reform to government corruption. He spoke on these issues readily, but cautiously. As the House Judiciary Committee reached a powerful and sobering decision on Watergate, Morgan was keeping his head down and running his campaign.⁵⁵ For some reason, Morgan did not want to touch the issue directly. Juxtaposing the touchy issue of government corruption was Morgan's eagerness to speak on the economy. The motive for this, at least, is clearer. Morgan's record as attorney general would only highlight his competency regarding economic issues. With Morgan's platform in mind, the research question can now be fully answered.

Section 3: Morgan's Answer

With Morgan's background and platform built, the full context of the 1974 election can take center stage. The adage "Never let a good crisis go to waste" might ring true for some politicians, but Morgan was not keen on capitalizing on Watergate. Morgan did frequently hit on the importance of governmental trust, but never in a way that grappled with Watergate. While the scandal dragged on, Morgan instead focused on his background as attorney general and the issues that he felt he should capitalize on. This paper will now answer the research question fully by contextualizing Morgan's actions. By applying contextual evidence to Morgan's platform and background, Morgan's avoidance of Watergate and emphasis of consumer protection will become clear.

This paper has already spent much time on the national context of the 1974 elections but has not yet touched on the specific context of Morgan's state. In 1974 North Carolina showed

⁵⁵ Emery, "Watergate" 449.

Democratic strength, but it was a conservative Democratic strength that was dominant in the south.⁵⁶ Morgan himself identified as a conservative Democrat. Though he might have couched that conservatism as flexible and light, it was nonetheless his identity.⁵⁷ This conservatism is significant because it directly ties into his constituency's opinions on Watergate. Morgan's campaign paid for a University of North Carolina poll that surveyed North Carolina voters within Catawba County.⁵⁸ This lengthy and informative study provided important insights for Morgan while he was running his campaign. Unsurprisingly, many conservatives had a greater propensity to remain supportive of Nixon. Though that support was still relatively low, it was often a non-insignificant margin of the electorate. A much more striking statistic saw a majority of conservatives wanting the Watergate Investigation to end. Many liberals, as it turned out, also wanted the same thing. It cannot be exaggerated how divisive and touchy Watergate and Nixon would have been for Morgan's voter base. Whether the voter was a pro-Nixon Republican, a conservative Democrat, or even a Democratic liberal, Morgan's statistics provided him with a poor cost-benefit analysis.

Those same statistics provided an enticing middle path. When those same voters were asked what "Self-described reactions to Watergate and Political Corruption" they had, they resoundingly answered that they would "Insist on finding out more about candidates." (91% reaction), "Tend to vote more for the candidate than the political party." (74% reaction), and "Vote against any man who doesn't get out to meet the people." (50% reaction). Rather than trying to maneuver through a highly divided voter base by speaking on Nixon directly, Morgan

⁵⁶ Lawrence, John A.. 2018. *The Class Of '74 : Congress after Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship*. 4.

⁵⁷ Robert B. Morgan, Speech, March 22nd, 1968, Folder I, Box 83, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

⁵⁸ Survey, June 1974, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, Folder C, Box 88, North Carolina Attorney General Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

could use that scandal's reaction to appeal to a much larger majority. That majority even said that they would vote more for the candidate than the party, further incentivizing Morgan to play an everyman.

And so, Morgan did just that. He tiptoed around Watergate and focused himself inward. He would never directly attack the inflictor of the nation's wound lest he open it further. Morgan turned to other issues that he knew a larger majority of voters would like to hear about; issues that allowed him to access that bi-partisan base. Morgan's poll found that the economy was that very issue. Inflation and cost of living were winning a cumulative 54% to Watergate's 27.3% when voters were asked what the nation's biggest issues were. On the margins, voters still echoed that they desired integrity in their politicians, an increase in law and order, and a need for oil. The solution was obvious for Morgan. In the interpretation section of the poll, the advice to Morgan was clear:

Interpretation

The oil companies are an excellent issue in this campaign. We think that Mr. Morgan can well link his outstanding record of consumer protection to this very issue. Washington needs a fighter who will control the big oil companies. More than that, this issue links the most important issue of inflation -- energy and big business -- into a single cause. It is a perfect populist issue and one worthy of special attention.

Finally, we would stick with the health care issue and continue to work on the honesty issue. Both of these issues, for different reasons, have great appeal and potential. The

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key to Robert Morgan's drive for the United States Senate is to give the voters a positive reason for supporting him. We feel the best plan is to stick with these four issues and pay only secondary attention to the other issues.

The momentum for Robert Morgan is there, and the work over the past six months has paid off; but there is more to be done. The key is to put the organization to work in turning out your vote while the candidate and the media advertising is focused on getting to the undecided voter.

One final and emblematic example of Morgan's strategy can be found in one of his last campaign materials. November 5th, the day of the 1974 election, Morgan's office released a list of his positions. With one last chance to summarize his platform to voters, Morgan's strategy can be observed in a pure form.



**Robert
Morgan**

**United States Senate
For North Carolina**

P. O. DRAWER M,

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA 27611

919/782-7852

WHERE HE STANDS --

--- On Money and Inflation

1. For balancing the Federal Budget and end deficit spending.
2. For cutting waste from federal spending, including the Defense Budget.
3. For more money and lower interest rates for home purchases.
4. For ending international blackmail of the U. S. by oil producing countries and bringing oil prices down.
5. For increasing production of goods now in short supply, such as fertilizer, which make food prices so high.

--- On Taxes

1. Against any surtax or increased tax on poor and middle income people.
2. For closing tax loopholes now enjoyed by the wealthy and large corporations.
3. For more fairness to single taxpayers who maintain households
4. For ending tax credits on foreign investments, encouraging Americans to invest at home.
5. For a minimum tax for people with large incomes who now pay no taxes at all.

--- On Health Care

1. For a National Health Insurance Program for all citizens which takes advantage of the best of government and the private insurance industry.
2. For encouraging medical personnel to locate in areas where people need medical services most.
3. For greater federal effort to produce more doctors.

(over)

--- On Consumer Protection

1. For having the consumer's viewpoint represented before federal agencies that determine the quality of services we will receive and the price we will pay for them.
2. For more vigorous enforcement of anti-trust laws.

--- On Agriculture

1. Against attempts by the Administration to destroy the flue-cured tobacco program and to remove acreage restrictions and price supports on cotton and peanuts.
2. Against wheat deals that cause shortages and raise food prices.
3. For a Secretary of Agriculture who understands North Carolina's problems and believes in the small family farm.

--- On Campaign Financing and Integrity in Government

1. For financial disclosure by all candidates for state and federal office.
2. For passage of a Code of Ethics for members of Congress.
3. For restoring the faith of the public in their elected officials.

ROBERT MORGAN has 24 years experience
in working for the people.

As ATTORNEY GENERAL, he was known as
the "People's Attorney." Now, he
wants to be the "People's Senator."

For North Carolina ELECT ROBERT MORGAN, U. S. SENATOR

Tuesday, November 5

Paid for by Morgan for U. S. Senate Committee
Henry Poole, Treasurer

The final platform fits almost perfectly with what the survey advised. He stuck to economics, tied in his consumer protection background, gave some service to secondary issues, and assured his voter base of his integrity.⁵⁹

Conclusions:

Watergate could not have been a scarier time for politicians. The Watergate scandal would not only cause the Nixon presidency to crumble, but it would be perceived as crippling an already tenuous public trust in institutions. Republicans and Democrats in Congress had been in a period of flux, and the Watergate scandal would see a drove of reformists elected in 1974. Those elected in response to Watergate would significantly alter Congress.

Through examining Robert Morgan's 1974 campaign, one is able to glimpse Watergate's influence during that historic midterm. Morgan, like any politician at the time, was forced to deal with an electorate that was deeply aware of a scandal that called into question the integrity of all politicians. Morgan's campaign would inevitably respond to the issue that Watergate had amplified. He would make a point of emphasizing his personal integrity and agreeing that the government needed to seriously reform. All the while, his record would aid him in doing so. By relying on his law-steeped background, he was able to speak on governmental trust from an advantageous position.

However, he would be careful to avoid the sticky subject of Watergate itself. By dexterously avoiding direct engagement with Nixon and his scandal, Morgan was able to play to his strengths and electorate. That electorate, after all, preferred that Morgan talk about other

⁵⁹ Robert B. Morgan, News Release, January 22nd, 1974, Folder D, Box 344, United States Senate Files, Robert Morgan Papers.

issues instead. By latching onto a strong economic platform that conveniently echoed his record as attorney general, Morgan was able to relegate Watergate's turbulent effects to a mellow, supplementary role in his campaign.