

Watergate Impact Remains Elusive

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Editor's Note — The Senate hearings are stilled for the moment, but the Watergate reverberations continue. This is the first of two articles looking at Watergate's effects at home and abroad.

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WASHINGTON (AP) — With Senate hearings in recess, government officials and politicians from the White House down have begun assessing the wear and tear of Watergate on the administration and the country.

After 10 weeks of often conflicting testimony, climaxing in a constitutional collision between President Nixon and Congress over the White House tape recordings, the ultimate impact of Watergate remains elusive.

But some interim effects are clear.

At the White House, reorganizations and resignations have brought drastic changes and some internal dissension. Former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, a newcomer at the White House because of Watergate, says: "There's some resentment of my being here." And aides say the turmoil has helped delay some programs.

In Congress, Watergate has diminished the President's strength. House and Senate-passed measures to limit his ability to impound money and force him to stop bombing Cambodia after Aug. 15. Watergate, says Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, third-ranking Republican, "swelled the margin on those votes."

In some Cabinet departments and executive agencies, Watergate resignations have caused a hectic shuffle. Twenty-five sub-Cabinet posts remain unfilled, or have acting directors. "Everybody is an acting," says one executive department official. "Some decisions are difficult to make."

Among Republican party officials across the country, queried by The Associated Press, some felt Watergate had hurt the GOP, more thought they could divorce the party — on the local level at least — from Watergate, and others said that all politicians, regardless of

party, had been hurt.

The President's popularity dropped to a low in a Gallup poll last month, with 40 per cent approving and 49 disapproving. A random sampling of ordinary citizens by The AP showed a broad spectrum of reactions, from people who thought Watergate was ordinary politics to others who felt the President was to blame. A number expressed boredom with the whole subject.

Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun, a Nixon appointee, struck a somber note last week when he declared:

"The pall of Watergate ... is upon us. The very glue of our

ship of state seems about to become unstuck. There is a resultant fear of consequent grave damage to the Democratic process of which we have been so proud and in which we firmly believed ... Seemingly, there is an environment of diffuse but broad taint and corruption in our public life ... "One may say that our Jerusalem is in ruins ..."

Some administration officials concede that Watergate caused a slump in government. On July 6, when he agreed to succeed John D. Ehrlichman, who resigned because of Watergate as the President's top domestic adviser, Laird said: "Government in some quarters is at a standstill." An aide says now that Laird exaggerated—deliberately, perhaps, to keep a standstill from happening. And Laird, citing recent successful compromises with Congress, said in an interview that the government now has regained momentum.

While acknowledging "there are many things that are going to take time to nature and blossom," retired Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., who replaced H. R. Haldeman, another Watergate casualty, as the President's chief of staff, said recently: "The directions have been set and are accepted and understood by all ... I am optimistic that we can establish a relatively dramatic difference from the last few months ..."

But Laird said in an interview that some degree of re-

sentment remains as a Watergate legacy. He told about difficulty he has experienced with others on the White House staff. "The truth is," he said, "there's some resentment to my being here ..."

Laird didn't go into details, but he acknowledged that White House advisers are split into hard-liners and soft-liners on Watergate questions. Laird, according to Republican House Leader Gerald Ford, was among "soft-liners" who counselled the President to turn over the presidential tapes, advice which Nixon has rejected.

Many congressmen and officials believe Watergate has brought a slackening of governmental pace, though examples are seldom clear-cut.

Officials feel the long-pending fuel allocation program to counter the gasoline shortage has been delayed partly "because there was nobody in the White House willing to make a decision."

The administration proposal to remove limits on interest rates for savings deposits also was cited. The plan, announced last Friday, is designed in part to assure funds for home mortgages.

In Congress, says Laird, the administration is recovering from the effects of Watergate. House Republican Leader Ford sees "a minimum" of Watergate impact upon Congress.

But Anderson, the third-ranking House Republican, says that Watergate has become "a watershed event" in a basic realignment with the White House.

This view is shared by Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield, who says Watergate has restored the balance of power between Congress and the executive branch.

Both point to passage of several bills to demonstrate Watergate impact. They include the Cambodian bombing deadline and measures that would restrict the President's power to make war and limit his authority to impound money appropriated by Congress.

Anderson concedes that the legislation might have been ap-

proved in the absence of Watergate, "but the effect of Watergate is there in all of those ...

"It contributed to the feeling that Congress simply couldn't go on deferring to the President forever on matters foreign and domestic. In concrete terms it swelled the margin on those votes. And, more important, it encouraged the proponents to be more aggressive, to push harder ...

"Unquestionably, Watergate did weaken the authority of the President."

Two Cabinet departments and several executive agencies have suffered, too, because of Watergate. The resignation of Atty. Gen. Richard Kleindienst began a shuffle that brought Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson into the Justice Department and left the Pentagon without a secretary of defense for several weeks.

While Richardson was being confirmed, says a Justice Department official in the Drug Enforcement Administration, "there was a gap in decision making. . . We felt at the time that there was a power hiatus."

It was during this period that the Pentagon sent to Congress false information about Cambodian bombing raids. One administration aide says the false information might not have been sent had the office of secretary of defense not been in mid-changeover.

An AP check of major states shows no significant slowdown in federal-state operations, although some state officials say federal decisions have been harder to come by.

Robert Milbourne, executive assistant in the Wisconsin state department of administration, said: "There's no question in our mind that almost every decision from the federal government has been delayed or muddled in some way in the last few months. Correspondence that normally would take two weeks now takes three or four weeks or even longer."

Across the land, Republicans are worried about what Watergate will do to their party. The Republican National Committee, faced with a potential \$1 million deficit in the wake of the scandal, is cutting back its staff by 25 per cent. A May 15 mail campaign for contributions drew half of what was expected, says press aide Jackie O'Connor.

Some state and local party officials say, however, that Watergate has hurt politicians in general. Says Kansas GOP chairman Jack Ranson: "It

won't necessarily affect just Republicans."

Robert Beverly, Republican leader in the California Assembly, says, "... I suspect the public, and particularly the California electorate, is in a mood for bloodletting at the ballot box. In short, incumbents beware."