

Nixon Is Too Preoccupied By Watergate Patman Says

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP)—House Banking and Currency Committee chairman Wright Patman said Monday the Watergate scandals have undermined President Nixon's ability to deal with problems of the economy.

"I think we would have had some action on interest rate controls if the president were not totally preoccupied with Watergate," Patman told a group of bankers.

The Texas Democrat also challenged Nixon's statement that national security considerations prompted White House interference with the Watergate investigation.

"Nixon could have invoked national security much earlier in the Watergate scandal, but instead chose not to," Patman said. The president's failure to do so earlier supports the belief that security plays a smaller

role in decision making than the White House admits, Patman said.

Speaking before members of the National Association of State Savings and Loan Supervisors, Patman was the latest prominent Democrat to challenge Nixon's recent Watergate statement. Party chairman Robert Strauss and Sens. Edward Muskie and Stuart Symington have also rejected national security as justification for limiting the Watergate probe.