

Nixon Hopes Watergate Is Past

By Lou Cannon
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White House officials said yesterday that President Nixon is convinced he has finally turned the corner on Watergate.

These officials said that Mr. Nixon is buoyed by the response to his press conference of last week and by President's view that he him. But they also described Mrs. Nixon as concerned about mounting inflation, particularly in food prices, which they said is the No. 1 problem facing the administration.

Alexander M. Haig Jr., the President's chief of staff, said that the Administration still believes it can contain inflation. At the same time Haig warned that the administration must not make promises which it could not keep.

Presidential counselor Anne Armstrong, liaison for the administration with state Republican organizations, described the economy as "the No. 1 issue."

In a series of interviews, some of them on the record and some on a not-for-attribution basis, White House officials shared the concern that the administration may be emerging from its Watergate crisis only to confront a dangerous inflationary situation.

They cited as reason for the optimism about Watergate the results of the most recent Harris poll in which 62 per cent agreed that "it is time to turn the whole question of Watergate over to the courts and allow the President to concentrate on more important things."

As a result, said White House aides, Mr. Nixon will no longer feel constrained by the "strategy of silence."

he followed on Watergate from May 22 until his August 15 televised speech from the White House. While the President intends to concentrate on issues other than Watergate, they said, he now believes he is free to speak and answer charges whenever necessary.

Mrs. Armstrong said this feeling of Watergate optimism is shared by Republican state party leaders throughout the country.

"They think we've turned the corner on Watergate," Mrs. Armstrong said. "... They don't think we've told the story on the economy properly and sufficiently."

This story, as Haig expressed it, is one in which the administration reconciles itself to higher prices for food while containing inflation generally. Haig, a former four-star

general who gave up his rank to become the President's chief of staff after the resignation of H. R. Halde- man, also reiterated commitment to an "open administration."

He said that the White House staff is now trying to assist the various departments of government rather than absorb them and that staff members have been instructed to assist cabinet officials whenever they are requested to do so.

Haig's interview by five reporters in his office here was unexpectedly interrupted by the drop-in visit of Henry Kissinger, the President's newly designated secretary of state.

With a broad smile on his face, Kissinger burst in the room and said, "the open administration — it's revolting, it's disgusting."