

'Disillusioned' Holton Plans Return to Law

By Helen Dewar

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Despite job overtures from the Nixon administration, Virginia Republican Gov. Linwood Holton said yesterday he plans to return to his law practice in Roanoke when his term ends in January.

Holton is known to be disillusioned with the President's handling of Watergate-related scandals and has reportedly been advised by at least one close confidant to steer clear of any administration appointment.

As recently as last week, Holton, an original organizer of Mr. Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, told a reporter it has been "damned disappointing" to see administration accomplishments undercut by what he called "isolationism" and "over-aggressive tactics" in the White House.

By his own definition a "complete political animal," Holton is also understood to be eager to maintain his political base in Virginia, perhaps for a race against U.S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. (Independent-Va.) in 1976.

In confirming a comment Monday from his wife that the family would resettle in Roanoke "for the immediate future," the 50-year-old Republican governor said concern for the couple's four children was the sole reason for the decision.

"There is nothing else involved," said Holton, who said only a few days ago he had been assured that a cabinet-level or ambassadorial job was virtually his for the asking.

Holton's decision to forsake some measure of national prominence raises the question of how a former governor, younger and more politically ambitious than most of

his predecessors, stays politically alive in a Roanoke law office.

Anticipating his decision to stay in Roanoke, Holton said last week he would probably wind up "back home . . ." watching political developments, helping with party-building.

Associates suggest another alternative: linking up with a new commission on national goals sponsored by New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and possibly joining in an effort to win the presidency for Rockefeller in 1975.

Holton reportedly discussed possible administration jobs with Alexander M. Haig Jr., White House chief of staff, at least once in the past few weeks.

Without mentioning Haig by name, Holton said yesterday that the post of ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was one of several jobs he discussed with the White House.

There has also been speculation that Holton was under consideration to succeed James Lynn as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, although Holton himself said recently that this was not likely.

Mrs. Holton said the NATO post in Brussels had been discussed in a family conference but was rejected because "an abnormal life for another four years" might be detrimental to the children, who are age 7 to 17.

Holton did not say what, if any, specific jobs had yet been offered and declined further comment.

Holton, Virginia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction, still speaks highly of President Nixon's



Associated Press

President Nixon and Virginia Gov. Linwood Holton shared laughs arm in arm last May as the President was leaving Norfolk after speech on Armed Forces Day.

achievement in international affairs and such domestic programs as federal revenue-sharing with the states.

In an interview last week, Holton said his relations with the President always remained cordial, despite rebuffs from White House aides, principally over Holton's moderate stand on school busing and his insistence that the Virginia GOP run a candidate against Byrd in 1970.

But, while stopping short of personal criticism of Mr. Nixon, he said he was disallu-

sioned by White House methods as reflected in its handling of the Watergate scandal.

"You start out and you support a guy (Mr. Nixon), and you do it honestly, and you see the accomplishments," he said. "Then you see the administration get into such a mess because of isolationism and because of overaggressive, overreaching tactics, freezing out, not disloyalty but simple disagreements. And you knew that it was going to destroy a President, distract from his

accomplishments ... it's damned disappointing."

Holton refrained from public criticism of Mr. Nixon's handling of Watergate at the recent Republican Governors Association Conference in Memphis, where he stepped down as conference chairman. But, unlike some governors who hailed the President's Watergate accounting in a personal appearance before the governors, Holton indicated to

See HOLTON, C8, Col. 8.

HOLTON, From C1

associates that he was disappointed.

While Holton enjoyed frequent visits to Washington and was always considered likely to take an administration job if a good one were offered, he has been acknowledged for months that he might be headed back to Roanoke, where he began his political career 20 years ago.

And he has made no secret of his desire to take on Byrd unless Byrd becomes a full-fledged Republican. There have also been suggestions that, if he forgoes the 1976 Senate race, he might seek the seat now held by U.S. Sen. William L. Scott (R-Va.) in 1978.

Holton was constitutionally barred from running to succeed himself this year and, so long as Lt. Gov.-elect John N. Dalton remains the strong favorite to win the GOP gubernatorial nomination in 1977, he almost certainly won't run for governor that year. The House of Representatives is also out because another Republican friend, former law partner M. Caldwell Butler, holds the Roanoke area (Sixth District) House seat.