

Watergate Held Crippling to Government

By David S. Broder
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The head of the U.S. Conference of Mayors said yesterday that Watergate has made it impossible for "government to govern," but he declared that impeachment and trial of President Nixon would be "disastrous for the country."

Roy B. Martin Jr., mayor of Norfolk and a 1972 leader in the Mayors for Nixon organization, said in a keynote address to the congressional conference of the National League of Cities and U.S. Conference of Mayors that the energy crisis is an example of a "problem that became an emergency through neglect."

"During the past year, we

have been a nation distracted from effective government by the tragedy of Watergate," Martin told some 1,500 local officials at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

His speech launched four days of Washington meetings by top local and state officials.

The nation's governors follow the mayors into the same hotel on Wednesday, and will also be weighing the impact of the Watergate scandals on their legislative programs and goals.

In an interview, Martin said the mayors' conference had taken no formal position on the impeachment of the President, but said that "personally, I feel an impeachment and trial would be disastrous for the country."

"If the President is determined to stay on," he said, "we ought to get on to other business. But the President has been damaged terrifically, and the question is how effective he can be."

Kenneth R. Cole Jr., assistant to the President for domestic affairs, spoke to the mayors at lunch and promised that Mr. Nixon would spend "each day of the next three years" in working for "a restored and revitalized system of effective local government."

There were audible snickers at that statement and at other Cole remarks praising the President.

His speech was uninterrupted by applause except for a burst of handclapping after he said that "I know some of you still have some doubts about the New Federalism," the name Mr. Nixon has given to his government decentralization plan.

Despite their differences with the administration on some issues, the mayors' main mission is to lobby in Congress for passage of some form of the urban development aid program which Mr. Nixon has labeled the Better Communities Act.

Cole said the White House supported the bill being shaped in a House subcommittee and predicted it could become law before July 1. Martin said the mayors' major concern was to insure continuance of urban aid on an interim basis in case Congress delays passage of the measure or sends it to the White House in a form Mr. Nixon decides to veto.

Those concerns were heightened by Cole's statement that "we have some very serious reservations" about a version of the bill the Senate Banking and Currency Committee has drafted.

Martin was unusually outspoken in his criticism of the administration's reaction to what he called "a time of great confusion and crisis." Rating the Nixon record on environmental, employment and energy programs, the Norfolk mayor said:

"What we have now, in this country, in addition to the usual problems, are a lot of unnecessary emergencies largely brought on by the inability of government to govern. This is at the root of any particular crisis we may have."