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**St. Clair Views Role as Counsel
To the Presidency, Not to Nixon**

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WASHINGTON, March 12—James D. St. Clair says he represents "the office of the Presidency," not the occupant of that office "individually."

He says it over and over, firmly if politely, drawing the line for the public record—"I don't represent Mr. Nixon personally; I represent him in his capacity as President."

In drawing that line, he neatly complemented in an interview yesterday the President's defense in a series of legal moves growing out of Watergate. For Mr. Nixon, in refusing for months to turn over the Watergate tapes to the special prosecutor, in refusing now to give certain material to the House impeachment inquiry, has explained that he is acting

to protect the Presidency, not himself.

Mr. Nixon has contended that he must protect the executive branch of the Government against incursions by the judicial or legislative branches; he has said he must not allow the Presidency to be weakened, lest other Presidents in the future be unable to carry out the

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job set for them by the Constitution.

And Mr. St. Clair, in describing his work, said that he spent much of his time trying to insure that there were no "unwarranted" incursions.

Many of the President's critics, of course, have contended that Mr. Nixon's actions so far have hurt the office of the Presidency in many ways. And it is obvious that if Mr. St. Clair ultimately succeeds in his defense of Mr. Nixon, he will have saved Mr. Nixon the individual—and not necessarily the office of the Presidency.

Mr. St. Clair, however, is adamant in spelling out his role. And the distinction he attempts to draw, between the Presidency and the present occupant of that office, serves other purposes in addition to bolstering his client's defense.

Mr. St. Clair's acceptance of the Nixon assignment last Jan. 4, for instance, raised some questions among his fellow lawyers and elicited some criticism too, despite the tradition of lawyers' taking on cases whether or not they believed in their clients' cause.

By saying that his client is the Presidency rather than Mr. Nixon—and by calling his job simply "a professional engagement," albeit one of "significant importance"—Mr. St. Clair in effect answers those who wondered, privately and in some cases publicly, why he would work for Richard Nixon.

On a practical level, moreover, Mr. St. Clair's distinction, if it is accepted, may answer the questions that have been raised about who should pay the President's legal bills.

Costs of Defense

Mr. St. Clair's salary is \$42,500; he has seven lawyers working with him on Mr. Nixon's Watergate defense team, and, he said in the interview, he may hire at least three more. He also has several non-lawyers on his staff. The total bill, should Mr. Nixon be impeached and this defense team

continue working through the trial of the impeachment, could thus go as high as several hundred thousand dollars.

At the moment the entire staff is paid by Government funds. But last January, at a news conference, Attorney General William B. Saxbe said that there might come a point when Mr. Nixon should take over the cost himself — paying the bills by a "defense fund," perhaps.

Mr. Saxbe declared that the Government should not pay the bills for the defense at a trial of impeachment charges, should such a trial take place. He also suggested that it would be improper for the Government to pay the defense bills even before a vote on impeachment, if the impeachment inquiry were proceeding on the basis of criminal allegations.

The Justice Department has not developed its position on the question, beyond what was stated by Mr. Saxbe in January. Mary Lawton, Deputy Assistant Attorney General for legal counsel, said today.

The time for making a ruling on who should pay the President's legal bills, Miss Lawton suggested, would come when it became clear what charges, if any, the impeachment committee was considering. If the charges are purely political, she said, it is at least arguable that the Government could continue to pay the bill, although, she added, public relations might dictate a different course.

Mr. Nixon was asked at a news conference last week whether he intended to take over the cost of his defense; he brushed the question aside, joking that if the Attorney General decided against him, he would find someone to lend him the money.