

# Sorting Out Nixon Papers

Washington

General Services Administrator Arthur Sampson said yesterday it probably will take until 1980 for him to complete the task of sorting out the sensitive papers of Richard Nixon's presidency.

In a lengthy meeting with reporters, Sampson spelled out painstaking details involved in the job that Congress gave his agency to determine which Nixon materials should be made public, which should be returned to the former president and which should be kept private.

Mr. Nixon has challenged the constitutionality of a law enacted last December 19 that authorized the GSA to take custody of the former President's materials and to determine their disposition.

A three-judge panel now is considering Mr. Nixon's challenge and the decision will likely be appealed to the Supreme Court when it comes, a process Sampson indicated might take 18 months to complete.

Not until then, he said, can the GSA begin to examine the massive amounts of presidential materials. They include 880 White House tapes covering 5000 hours of conversation, 435,000 photographs and 42 million pieces of paper. The physical volume of the materials aggregates 37,000 cubic feet.

Sampson said he will comply with the law's requirement to report to Congress March 19 on his plan for sorting through the materials.

In a preview of what the report will say, Sampson said that he intends to lay out a plan that will avoid injecting politics into the process as much as possible.

Sampson said that he will enlist a group of professional archivists to do the sorting, which will be supervised by a panel of senior archivists. Where materials fall into a "gray area" of disposition Sampson said, he intends to appoint a presidential materials review board composed of individuals outside the GSA.

This board will make recommendations to the GSA

administrator, and if the administrator disagrees with the recommendations he will have to state his reasons in writing. All decisions may be appealed in the courts.

The law also instructed Sampson to return to Mr. Nixon "private or personal materials." To define these materials, Sampson said the GSA has spoken to the staffs of former presidential families, librarians at universities housing other presidential material, members of Congress, the special prosecutor and the Justice Department.

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