

A Publisher's Blast at the Nixon Administration

By Michael Harris

Katharine Graham, publisher of the Washington Post, accused the Nixon administration yesterday of undertaking a deliberate campaign against the First Amendment of the Constitution in the hope of silencing its critics.

"There has been a good deal of evidence of an intensified campaign to undermine public confidence not just in the Washington Post but in those segments of the news media which are thought to be hostile to the administration," Mrs. Graham said.

She charged there were efforts "to inhibit the functioning of the press — to sport with something that responsible public officials ought to be the first to uphold, the free flow of communications between the government and the governed."

DANGER

The danger in these tactics, Mrs. Graham declared, goes far beyond the harm they could do the Post and other newspapers.

"This is also your business," Mrs. Graham told members of the Commonwealth Club at a luncheon at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel.

"These are also your rights and freedoms. When the press is intimidated and circumscribed in its capacity to report and inform and enlighten, it is the public that loses in the end by losing its capacity to participate in a self-governing society."

WATERGATE

Mrs. Graham cited the Watergate case as an important example.

"We covered it in depth because it was major news," she said. "It would have been an equally important story and we would have given it the same treatment regardless of which party was in power..."

"We were initially confronted with a highly unusual burglary — a burglary of the headquarters of a national political party," she said. "It was obviously a police reporter's story, and the editors put two of our best police reporters on it."

A White House consultant and the security coordinator of the Committee for the Re-election of the President were arrested. Cash for the sabotage operation came from a safe in the office of the committee's finance director, she said.

"These stories uncovered by our reporters, far from being politically partisan, were in the highest traditions of American journalism," Mrs. Graham said.

Administration spokesmen responded, Mrs. Graham declared, chiefly with "ambiguous and unsubstantiated denials" and accusations that the Washington Post was seeking to harm it politically.

NEUTRAL

"To have done that would have been to gamble the reputation and fortunes of the Washington Post in an

incredibly reckless manner for the essentially elusive — and, given the circumstances, forlorn — political purpose of electing George McGovern," Mrs. Graham said.

The Post said of McGovern, "... The burden of proof in the case for change is upon the man who would supplant a sitting President — and George McGovern has failed to meet that burden convincingly."

The Post, has not endorsed a presidential candidate since Dwight D. Eisenhower, and didn't back either McGovern or Mr. Nixon.

Mrs. Graham also criticized the Nixon administration for supporting efforts to force reporters to reveal confidential sources.

"The right to protect con-

fidential sources is important enough to our profession that reporters are willing to go to jail to uphold it — and have," she said.