

Fog Over San Clemente

President Nixon has done a good deal but, regrettably, not enough to dissipate the swirling fog of confusion he allowed to arise over the financing of his estate in San Clemente. To clarify the questions left obscure by last week's White House statement and the subsequent explanations of a Presidential spokesman, an auxiliary statement is much in order.

That statement could best come from Robert H. Abplanalp, the wealthy New York businessman who played a pivotal part in the transaction. It would help if he made public all the circumstances of his role in the original purchase of the estate in 1969 and the names of other participants, if any, in the private company he established to buy the greater portion of the land a year later. Such disclosure is all the more important since there are no public documents on file reflecting the reported division of the property in 1970 and since Mr. Nixon's public statement of net worth in last year's campaign apparently did not state accurately the size of his indebtedness.

High public officials, unlike private persons, have to make public their private finances because they are responsible for managing huge sums of taxpayers' money and because their official decisions affect the course of many business and financial developments. It is therefore essential that all citizens have confidence that high public officials are under no untoward financial pressures or compromising influences.

It may be embarrassing for the President to acknowledge publicly that he is heavily in debt to a single wealthy friend, but the truth is always easier to live with than the deliberate mystification with which the White House had originally surrounded this subject. Now that it has begun to dispel this fog, the White House must go all the way and get the rest of the facts on the record. There would still remain substantial concern over the propriety of Mr. Nixon becoming so heavily indebted to any private individual, even if he is a close friend and uninvolved in Government contracts as Mr.

Abplanalp appears to be. A President or any other public official is in a stronger position when he avoids such private entanglements.