

The Role of Confidential News Sources

Washington

Five prominent journalists who once served as officials of the White House, State Department or Justice Department said in court papers yesterday that reporters benefit the public when they accept confidential information.

The five — including James Hagerty, former presidential press secretary during the Eisenhower Administration — said the government also benefits from

the frequent practice of giving reporters confidential data to help them understand other facts which they may publish. Attempts to compel newsmen to disclose information given them in confidence can harm the public interest, they said.

Hagerty and the others submitted affidavits in federal court to support the Los Angeles Times' stand against a subpoena for unpublished materials relating to the newspapers' interview of Alfred C. Baldwin III, a

key government witness in the Watergate bugging case.

Attorneys for the Times and for Jack Nelson and Ronald J. Ostrow, the reporters who interviewed Baldwin for a story published October 5, asked Chief U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica to quash the subpoena. Sirica is expected to rule on the motion today after hearing oral arguments.

Sirica issued the subpoena last week at the request of Watergate defense attor-

neys. It ordered the Times' materials to be submitted to Sirica today.

Besides Hagerty, others who furnished affidavits were Robert J. Manning, editor-in-chief of Atlantic Monthly; John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean; Edwin O. Guthman, national editor of the Los Angeles Times; and Clark R. Mollenhoff, Washington bureau chief of the Des Moines Register and Tribune.

N.Y. Times Service