

Nixon & Press

A HEALTHIER White House attitude toward the press — for the time being, at least — shapes up as an unforeseen benefit resulting from exposure of the Watergate political scandals.

President Nixon, in his nationwide telecast on Watergate, reversed his own past general pattern of disdain by applauding the “vigorous free press” for its major role in uncovering the administration disgrace.

“Just continue to give me hell when you think I’m wrong,” he told a group of reporters later.

This switch in posture subsequently was matched by press secretary Ron Ziegler. He publicly apologized to newsmen whose probing into the Watergate mess he earlier had called “shoddy, shabby journalism.”

Now Vice President Agnew has openly affirmed that the White House would like a better working relationship with what he once labeled “the nattering nabobs.”

“We should begin a reasoned discussion of differences,” he said in a speech before the Maryland Press Club. “The Administration is prepared to participate in such a discussion.”

Much good could result if this invitation, and the attitude change it seems to reflect, turn out to be for real and not just momentarily expedient.

The invitation could, for example, lead to frequent and regularly-scheduled presidential press conferences long needed to insure a free flow of credible White House information to the public.