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**Laird Says Nation Can't Afford
To Be Distracted From Issues**

By NANCY HICKS

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WASHINGTON, June 28—The White House domestic adviser, Melvin R. Laird, said today that the country could not afford to let itself be distracted by Watergate and, in the process, neglect problems and challenges it faces.

Speaking at a luncheon meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of the National Institute of Dental Research, and to newsmen afterward, Mr. Laird said, "The American agenda of issues and problems and decisions and dreams and demands deserves our attention right now."

The reference to Watergate was implied in and specified after the 25-minute speech which was devoted almost exclusively to summarizing the accomplishments of the Administration and urging support for it.

"When the American people gave President Nixon the most overwhelming vote of confidence in the history of this Republic, they were voting for the man's ideas as well as for the man himself," the former Secretary of Defense told the 150 dentists.

Cites 'Breakthroughs'

"And I can say this afternoon that this Administration is as determined and dedicated as it ever has been to giving the American people the leadership they voted for last November and the leadership we believe they still want today," he said.

"It was the President's policy of keeping America strong and keeping American policy credible that led to the historic breakthroughs with China and Russia.

"We can hardly afford now

to turn our backs on the policies that have brought us to this junction, if we are to prevent international turmoil from continuing to be a distraction from the pursuit of our domestic goals," he said.

Mr. Laird had accepted the luncheon engagement before he returned to the Administration as chief domestic adviser to the President on June 6, as a Representative from Wisconsin, Mr. Laird had sponsored legislation to expand the National Institutes of Health, of which the National Institute of Dental Research is a part.

"Gentlemen, I am delighted that you could all attend the 25th anniversary of the National Institute of Dental Research. I'm glad to see such a good turnout for the celebration," Mr. Laird said to reporters who waited to question him about Watergate after the speech at the Washington Hilton.

Asked when the President would answer reporters' questions generated from the Senate testimony of John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, Mr. Laird replied:

"The idea that the President is not going to have a news conference to answer questions [arising from the Senate Watergate hearings] is in error.

"I would not think the President wants to be in a position in which he is responding to every single witness who appeared before the committee."

Mr. Laird said the President was waiting to see if the hearings would continue now or would be suspended for a short period. In any case, the White House "will go forward at our own time, he said.