

Nixon, Back in the Capital, Will Step Up Activist Role

By JOHN HERBERS

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 13—President Nixon returned to Washington today after an 18-day California vacation, prepared to plunge into a new round of government activity that his aides hope will divert some attention from his Watergate troubles and enhance his chances of continuing in office for the three years remaining in his term.

In effect, the President has decided to return to the strategy for restoring his credibility that he used frequently without much success last year—to show the nation a President so deeply engrossed in his job that the agitation for his resignation or impeachment would fade.

"Operation Candor," the ambitious effort to clear the President's name through a series of meetings with political leaders and disclosure of documents and other information, fizzled out while Mr. Nixon was in California. This came about when he decided to resist in court efforts of the Senate Watergate committee to subpoena hundreds of tape recordings and documents, a return to his defense of executive privilege, and after long statements were issued in the controversies over the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation antitrust case and the milk price rise, both in 1971.

No Disclosures or Meetings

The President's assistants said there were no plans for further public disclosure of information or for meetings in which the President opens himself to extensive questioning. He has not held a news conference since Nov. 17 and there was no sign today that any was planned for the near future.

Mr. Nixon essentially is back to where he was in October, when he said he could best re-establish his credibility by showing that he has a firm grip on his job and refraining from "wallowing in Watergate."

White House officials say that despite the difficulties facing him—the continuing inquiry into possible impeachment in the House and the expected imminent indictment of former high Nixon officials—there are some signs of encouragement.

They said that he had demonstrated his willingness to answer questions on Watergate and that their surveys of the country and talks with political leaders, largely in Republican areas, showed that there was not strong public support for impeachment. Further, they say the Government is headed into a period in which Mr. Nixon will find it more advantageous than last summer and fall in assuming a more activist role as President.

Domestic Proposals

Congress will return on Jan. 21, and Mr. Nixon is planning to deliver in person a State of the Union Message that will contain some ambitious proposals in domestic affairs. These

include legislation for welfare reform, national health insurance, further Federal aid in mass transit and other matters.

After the State of the Union, he will submit to Congress a budget that is expected to reach \$300-billion, compared with \$269-billion for the current fiscal year. A substantial increase will go for national defense, but most of the rise will be for uncontrollable items such as Social Security and debt interest.

Next month, the President plans to take a more activist role in the energy crisis, as representatives of several nations come to Washington for a meeting he called on Feb. 11 to coordinate strategy for making more fuel available.

Both Mr. Nixon's supporters and his critics agree that the next few weeks could be crucial as the court proceedings on Watergate unfold and as the 1974 political year takes shape and Congressional opinion on impeachment matures. For that reason, his assistants are looking forward to a period of intense activity in which he can be depicted in a leadership role.

Brooding Isolation

As he returned to Washington, however, the President's mood continued to be an important factor in what lies ahead. In California, he appeared to return, as he does periodically, to a season of brooding isolation. There were indications that he was less enthusiastic about Operation Candor than some of his aides and Republican leaders who had urged it on him.

The President arrived at Andrews Air Force Base at 3 A.M. after flying on a small Air Force jet with members of his family and his friend, C. G. Rebozo, who has been at his side through his California stay. The plane departed from Edwards Air Force Base, near Palm Springs, where the President had been for three days, playing golf and going for long walks with Mr. Rebozo on the estate of Walter H. Annenberg, Ambassador to Britain.

His return to Washington was not announced until after his plane had departed. Earlier, his spokesman had said that the President would remain at the desert estate at least through today. There was no press pool, which until recent weeks has been customarily assigned to the President whenever he travels outside the Washington area.

Mr. Nixon went to his San Clemente home on Dec. 26 on a commercial flight, rather than take his large jet, to set a good example in the energy crisis. He did not return by commercial flight, his aides said for "security reasons."

"He decided to go back this evening," Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, said last night. "so he could rest Sunday, watch the Super Bowl Game and be ready to go to work at the White House on Monday."