

How Watergate Handicaps Simon

Washington

Energy chief William E. Simon said yesterday the biggest handicap to getting his job done is the public's loss of confidence in the Nixon administration.

"To restore public confidence is not an option for this government, any more than collecting taxes is an option. This is an imperative," Simon told a capacity audience at the National Press Club.

Simon's speech centered on the efforts of his own Federal Energy Office to conduct its business publicly and earn credibility. He carefully avoided direct criticism of the Nixon administration.

But Simon left no doubt that his message also applied to the rest of government and the impact of the Watergate scandal.

Simon, deputy secretary of the Treasury for more than a year before his appointment in December as energy chief, said his new job, with its exposure to the

The Last Meeting

Sacramento

The Coordinating Council for Higher Education held its 99th and final meeting here yesterday. For 13 years it had provided advice on public higher education in California.

The advisory function served by the ten-member council will be taken up April 1 by the newly created 23-member California Postsecondary Education Commission.

public, "brought me to realize the magnitude of our national disillusionment."

"Without question, the most serious impediment to the effective performance of my job has been, and continues to be, that sad and overworked word, credibility," he said.

The new commission, which already has held an initial organizational meeting, was created by the 1973 legislature. The legislation spells out a mandate for the new statewide agency to eliminate waste and "unnecessary duplication" and to "promote diversity, innovation and responsiveness to student and societal needs through planning and coordination."

Our Correspondent

"This has been a year of great stress for governmental credibility. The fact is that the public is no longer willing to give public officials the benefit of the doubt."

The people "crave openness in government," he said.

"A democracy's validity can be measured by the extent to which a people can know about the affairs of the government.

"If the government knows or can find out what the people are up to, but the people do not know and cannot find out what the government is up to, then the people don't control their government; it controls them."

Government can earn confidence, he said, by being open to scrutiny not only when it is right, but also "when we are wrong, when we have goofed."

He said the FEO will soon appoint an information access officer, and that officer and Simon himself will be the only ones authorized to deny a request for information, he said.

He said information will be withheld only if it involves national security, proprietary information, personal privacy of similar compelling reasons.

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