

Nixon Asks Presumption of Innocence

By Carroll Kilpatrick
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The White House yesterday adopted a business-as-usual stance with respect to the Watergate indictments, and President Nixon urged all Americans to remember that those indicted "are presumed innocent" unless proved guilty.

He expressed the hope that the forthcoming trials "will move quickly to a just conclusion" and reiterated his earlier statement that the place to settle the Watergate issue is in the courts.

For the most part, the President hewed to a normal schedule, without disclosing his innermost thoughts on the indictment of some of his oldest and closest associates.

He began the day with an hour-long meeting with his energy and economic advisers to discuss issues that could af-

fect his future in office almost as much as Watergate.

Then he secluded himself in the Oval Office with Alexander M. Haig Jr., White House staff chief, and press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler to receive news of the court action.

A short time later, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren walked glumly into the press room to face reporters alone.

The first question was about the seven indictments handed down in U.S. District Court here only a short time earlier. Warren was prepared, and read the following statement:

"The President has always maintained that the judicial system is the proper forum for the resolution of the questions concerning Watergate.

"The indictments indicate that the judicial process is finally moving toward resolution of the matter.

"It is the President's hope that the

trials will move quickly to a just conclusion.

"The President is confident that all Americans will join him in recognizing that those indicted are presumed innocent unless proof of guilt is established in the courts."

When reporters began asking questions, Warren in the main referred them back to the prepared statement.

He declined to say when it was prepared, but he did say that the President learned of the indictments from the news wires and had no advance information.

Ziegler and Haig handed him the reports as they came in. Warren said.

When asked if the President still believed that John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, his two closest aides until they resigned under fire last April 30, were "two of the finest public servants it has been my privi-

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lege to know," as he said then, Warren replied: "You have the statement."

When another reporter asked if the President still believed that Ehrlichman and Haldeman would be found innocent, he was given the same answer.

Asked if the White House had any information with respect to the sealed document the grand jury delivered to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica and which is believed to have information regarding the President, Warren replied: "None whatsoever."

After reading the news of the Watergate grand jury indictment, Mr. Nixon held two meetings where photographers normally would have been admitted briefly. Yesterday they were not.

The first meeting was with Mayor Tom Stuart of Meridian, Miss., who gave the President a statement of support signed by 20,000 Mississippians.

After that meeting, the President met with officers of the Reserve Officers Association.

Last night, the President and Mrs.

Nixon gave the second dinner in as many days for a group of congressmen and their wives. The dinners, apparently held to repair relations with Capitol Hill, were for "members the President has known for a long time," Warren said.

The dinners were described as strictly social, with about 30 members and their wives at each. At the Thursday dinner, the President paid tribute to retiring Sen. George D. Aiken (R-Vt.), dean of the Senate, and Aiken responded with a brief speech.

After the dinner, the President and Mrs. Nixon went with their guests to the White House theater for a showing of the movie "The Sting." The movie shown last night was "Friendly Persuasion."

Democrats as well as Republicans were invited to both dinners.

Warren said that Mr. Nixon would work this weekend on the message to go with his promised veto of the energy emergency bill. The House passed the measure Wednesday and the President announced Thursday that he would veto it because, he said, it would

mean the production of less rather than more oil to meet the nation's needs.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) echoed the White House appeal for a presumption of innocence of those charged in yesterday's indictments.

"The constitutional, legal and judicial processes are all functioning," Mansfield said. He added that those indicted "are not guilty until proven, as the President said this is a matter for the courts."

White House aides were reluctant to discuss publicly or privately the implications of the grand jury indictments. But one said there were "no surprises, and some reports had indicated many more persons would be indicted."

"The President has not been charged with anything," another aide commented, maintaining that the President's innocence also should be presumed.

"My guess is that as far as the public is concerned the significance of the indictments already has been discounted," said another.