

'Cheapened' by Watergate

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DONALD SANTARELLI
... wants out

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President's name as the chief executive," he said.

"It is foolish for me to say that the President can't fire me since I serve at the pleasure of the President. What I am saying is that I see no reason for him to fire me since I am carrying out his policies at LEAA."

In the interview, Santarelli talked about the government and the problems of government service. The government, he said, "is just a nastier place to be these days."

"You are suspect at every turn in the read of being part of a crippled and lame administration. You are not entitled to the assumption being as clean as you were five years ago, four years ago, three years ago."

And that makes him "somewhere between bitter and disappointed" about the whole thing.

He still has some things he wants to do at LEAA, he says, but when a presidential nomination to a Republican seat on the Federal Communications Commission was dangled before his eyes recently, he quietly let it be known he wasn't interested.

"I'm no longer politically ambitious, if you can believe that."

He insists that he would have felt the same, even without Watergate. "I've just seen too many deals," he said in an interview, deals in which politics took priority over moral considerations "almost all the time."

"People really don't care about the quality of the performance and the quality of

For Donald Santarelli, head of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the revelations of Watergate have "measurably cheapened" government service.

And Santarelli, at 36, wants out — not today, not tomorrow, but soon.

In the meantime, he will "very assiduously avoid" the use of President Nixon's name when he's out in public. Nor will he worry about catching any heat because "there is nobody to can me ... no White House any more to deal with."

After learning that these observations were being

published, Santarelli said he had misunderstood the ground rules of the interview and that his remarks were "not meant to be published."

He did not challenge the accuracy of any of the remarks attributed to him but said they were "taken out of context from a casual conversation."

"It is true that I avoid using the President's name in circumstances where I deem it to be counterproductive, such as student audiences, since I try to run LEAA in a nonpartisan, nonpolitical way. There are many instances when I do use the

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the service you deliver," Santarelli said. "Extraneous considerations, the liaisons, relationships, political alliances, bottom lines of power sharing" are what matter, he said.

"It's very often what you can get away with rather than what you should get away with."

All this is not unique to the Nixon administration, Santarelli said. "It's not going to be believed, but the level of morality is the same now as before."

What is unique, Santarelli feels, is the "stupidity" with which it was done.

The result has been that "you can't accomplish nearly as much" as before Watergate. "Everywhere I go, people say, 'What's the story about this stuff,' and you end up responding to questions and charges which are truly peripheral to your mission and which further compromise your mission."

At LEAA, Santarelli's mission is to dispense federal funds to state and local law-enforcement officials for crime-fighting projects.

He was named head of LEAA on March 20, 1973, one day before the President says he learned for the first time about the Watergate cover-up. Out on the road, Santarelli said, there's the problem that "you can't use the President's name like you used to be able to. I very assiduously avoid the use of his name." It "further ruins your ability to communicate with your audience," he said.

As for future young men in government, Santarelli rejects the counsel of former White House aide Gordon Strachan, who told the

Senate Watergate committee last summer that his advice to young people thinking of a career in government would be to "stay away."

"I don't agree with Strachan at all," Santarelli says.

"Totally the contrary. I would say come and bring new dimensions to this world. I'm not sure it will work, but I do know one thing, that more old men in government is not a better answer."