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Aides Describe How He Feels

Washington

The White House Chief of Staff acknowledged last night that President Nixon's position has suffered "an erosion," but rejected assessments that his impeachment by the House of Representatives is a sure thing.

"The case for impeachment is not there," Alexander M. Haig Jr. told an interviewer.

If the House were to impeach Mr. Nixon, would he resign to avoid the "trauma of a Senate trial?" Haig was asked.

"At this juncture, I see no value served in the interests of the people to have presidents driven out of office," he replied.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon returned to Washington yesterday after two weeks in California "anguished" by the committee vote against him but determined to carry forward the uphill battle against impeachment in the House.

Before leaving San Clemente in the early afternoon, after 16 days at his home, the President was described by aides as confident in the ultimate outcome of the two-year-old Watergate crisis.

Declaring that Mr. Nixon has "a tremendous capacity of discipline," press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said the President has "no feeling of despair" and has not allowed "anger to overtake him."

"Certainly there is anguish," Ziegler said. "Certainly, there is disappointment."

Ziegler asserted that it is incorrect to say "we have given up or that the President has given up."

Haig appeared on the CBS television program "Sixty Minutes." Mike Wallace had taped an interview with him in Los Angeles yesterday morning, only half a day after the House Judiciary Com-

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mittee had voted 27 to 11 to recommend the first impeachment of a President since 1868.

Haig had been with Mr. Nixon in San Clemente.

Wallace suggested that impeachment by the House seems "cut and dried," citing estimates by Democratic and Republican House leaders: the composition of the House — 248 Democrats and 187 Republicans — and the vote of six of the 17 GOP members of the Judiciary

Committee to recommend adoption of a first article of impeachment.

"We don't accept that," Haig said. "I am confident that if the members of the House assess the charges against the President . . . against the hard evidence, they are going to find that the evidence is not there to sustain the kind of charges that are before the committee." The charges are "a grab bag of generalities," he said.

Wallace, asserting that White House estimates of the Watergate scandal and its impacts have been "consistently wrong," asked, "Why should anyone believe that you're not just whistling past the graveyard once again?"

Haig once more emphasized his belief that the evidence to sustain impeachment is insufficient, and he appealed to each House member to look to his conscience to see if the judgment of insufficiency is not correct.

Haig said it had long been felt in the White House that the Judiciary Committee would be a lost cause. He said that as early as February "there were discussions that perhaps he could hold three or four Republicans." Having held 11, the President did well, he suggested.

As Haig portrayed it, the committee is unrepresenta-

tive of the House. Eight of 37 members had voted against the nomination of then-House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford to be Vice President, he recalled.

"You say we have no strategy to defend the President," Haig told Wallace. "Of course, we have a strategy. Our strategy is to have those bodies that are dealing with it (impeachment), to deal with the facts and the evidence," and to try to "avoid the emotionalism and the kinds of groundswell . . . that foreclose and prejudice issues."

Wallace reminded Haig that a year ago, in an interview on "Sixty Minutes," he

had said the American people are smart and finally will come up with the right judgment on Watergate.

Yet now, Wallace continued, the Gallup Poll indicates Mr. Nixon's popularity to be at a record low, 24 percent, and the Harris Poll shows a majority of the public believes the President should be not only impeached, but convicted.

"I've always been suspicious of polls," Haig said, while emphasizing that "I do respect the American people" and that there can be "waves and swings" of opinion.

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PRESIDENT AND MRS. NIXON DEBARKED
Arrival at Washington from California