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BY RICHARD E. LERNER

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- PRESIDENT FORD NAMED VICE PRESIDENT NELSON ROCKEFELLER SUNDAY TO HEAD AN EIGHT-MEMBER COMMISSION INVESTIGATING ACCUSATIONS THAT THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY HAS ILLEGALLY SPIED ON THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.

THOSE NAMED TO SERVE UNDER ROCKEFELLER ON THE PANEL INCLUDED FORMER REPUBLICAN GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN OF CALIFORNIA; IRWIN N. GRISWOLD, A PRIVATE LAWYER WHO WAS U.S. SOLICITOR GENERAL FROM 1967-72; AND JOSEPH LANE KIRKLAND, SECRETARY-TREASURER OF THE AFL-CIO SINCE 1969.

FORD ANNOUNCED SATURDAY HE WAS ESTABLISHING THE "BLUE RIBBON" COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE CHARGES AGAINST THE CIA AND DETERMINE WHETHER THE AGENCY HAD "EXCEEDED ITS STATUTORY AUTHORITY" UNDER A 1947 LAW BARRING IT FROM DOMESTIC SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITIES.

THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION WAS TRIGGERED BY ALLEGATIONS IN NEWS REPORTS AND FROM CONGRESSMEN THAT THE CIA CARRIED OUT BURGLARIES AND ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE DURING THE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S AND THAT IT SPIED OR KEPT FILES ON AS MANY AS 10,000 AMERICANS, PARTICULARLY ACTIVISTS OPPOSED TO THE VIETNAM WAR.

FORD DIRECTED THE COMMISSION TO REPORT ANY EVIDENCE OF ILLEGAL ACTIVITY TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL. IN ADDITION, THE PRESIDENT SAID THE FBI ALREADY HAS BEGUN ITS OWN INVESTIGATION OF WHETHER THE CIA BROKE THE LAW.

"IT IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS REPUBLIC THAT WE MEET OUR SECURITY REQUIREMENTS AND AT THE SAME TIME AVOID IMPAIRING OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS," FORD SAID IN HIS STATEMENT ANNOUNCING FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION.

OTHER COMMISSION MEMBERS NAMED SUNDAY INCLUDED RET. ARMY GEN. LYMAN L. LEMNITZER, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF FROM 1960-63; C. DOUGLAS DILLON, SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY FROM 1960-65; JOHN T. CONNOR, CHAIRMAN OF THE ALLIED CHEMICAL CORPORATION; AND

EDGAR F. SHANNON, WHO RETIRED THIS YEAR AFTER 15 YEARS AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

THE COMMISSION WAS ORDERED TO DELIVER ITS REPORT TO FORD BY MARCH

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THE PRESIDENT, IN ANNOUNCING CREATION OF THE PANEL, SAID HE WANTED IT "TO DETERMINE WHETHER EXISTING SAFEGUARDS ARE ADEQUATE TO PRECLUDE AGENCY ACTIVITIES THAT MIGHT GO BEYOND ITS AUTHORITY AND TO MAKE APPROPRIATE RECOMMENDATIONS."

PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY RON NESSEN SAID THE PANEL'S REPORT WOULD BE SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS AND EVENTUALLY WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC.

A NUMBER OF CONGRESSMEN HAVE CALLED FOR INVESTIGATIONS OF THE CIA, INCLUDING ONE PROPOSAL FOR A WATERGATE-TYPE SPECIAL PROSECUTOR TO EXAMINE THE AGENCY'S OPERATIONS AND TAKE ANY NECESSARY LEGAL ACTION. FORD HAS SAID HE WOULD WELCOME INDEPENDENT CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATIONS.

THE MAKEUP OF THE COMMISSION NAMED BY FORD WAS BROAD, APPARENTLY IN AN EFFORT TO DRAW FROM A VARIETY OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND GIVE THE PANEL HIGH CREDIBILITY FOR ITS SENSITIVE TASK.

FORD'S CHOICE OF ROCKEFELLER TO HEAD THE COMMISSION WAS THE FIRST SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENT GIVEN TO THE NEW VICE PRESIDENT, WHO WAS SWORN INTO OFFICE DEC. 19.

THE WHITE HOUSE HAD SAID PREVIOUSLY THAT ROCKEFELLER WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR OVERALL OPERATION OF THE DOMESTIC COUNCIL AND SEVERAL OTHER GENERAL AREAS.

REAGAN, WHO JUST STEPPED DOWN AFTER EIGHT YEARS AS GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA, HAS BEEN CONSIDERED -- LIKE ROCKEFELLER -- A VIRTUALLY CERTAIN CANDIDATE FOR THE 1976 GOP PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION SHOULD FORD CHANGE HIS MIND AND DECIDE NOT TO SEEK A FULL TERM.

GRISWOLD, NOW IN PRIVATE LAW PRACTICE IN MARYLAND, SERVED AS DEAN OF THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS. HE THEN BECAME U.S. SOLICITOR GENERAL, MAKING HIM THE CHIEF JUSTICE DEPARTMENT PROSECUTOR. HE ALSO SERVED SIX YEARS AS A MEMBER OF THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION.

BILLON IS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF BILLON, READ AND CO., A MAJOR STOCK BROKERAGE FIRM.

LEMNITZER, ONE OF THE NATION'S MOST FAMOUS MILITARY FIGURES IN THE YEARS AFTER WORLD WAR II, STEPPED DOWN AS CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF IN 1963 AND SERVED THE NEXT SIX YEARS AS SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER IN EUROPE. HE RETIRED IN 1969.