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Ford denies having offered deal to impeach Douglas

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford testified Thursday that he and two other congressmen did not offer to help millionaire Louis Wolfson with his legal problems if he would help their effort to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

Ford testified at his House confirmation hearing that a lawyer working for the congressmen, Benton L. Becker, offered on his own to help the financier. But Ford said the congressmen did not.

The issue was raised by Rep. Jerome R. Waldie (D-Calif.), who read a file of letters on the offer. Waldie told newsmen outside the House Judiciary Committee hearing, "The inference is that Becker offered the influence of the congressmen he represented."

In a letter dated Sept. 3, 1970, Becker told Wolfson's lawyer, William O. Bittman, that Ford and the other two congressmen were looking into Justice Douglas' dealings with Albert Parvin. Becker said it

was believed that a conversation with Wolfson "could shed light upon the inner workings of the Parvin Dohrman Co."

Becker concluded the letter by saying, "I am personally sympathetic to your client's present plight and would be anxious to assist him in any way available to me."

Waldie then put on the record a letter from Bittman to Wolfson saying that if he cooperated in the Douglas inquiry, "the congressmen he (Becker) represented probably could be of some assistance to you in connection with your second case."

Waldie told newsmen later he did not know what Wolfson's second case was except that it was connected with Wolfson's conviction in a stock fraud case. Wolfson was convicted in 1967 of selling \$2.7-million worth of unregistered stock and was convicted in 1968 of obstruction of justice.

But Ford told the confirmation committee that it was clear from Becker's letter that he was making the offer

of help for Wolfson on his own and that offer "became enlarged in Bittman's mind."

Becker was hired by Representatives Joe D. Waggonner Jr. (D-La.), Louis C. Wyman (R-N.H.) and Ford.

Waldie said both Becker and Bittman would be called to testify at Ford's confirmation hearings later.

Earlier, Ford told the committee he disagreed with President Nixon's past practice of taping recordings conversations without telling the other party about it. "It is my belief that if you are to have a recording, it should be known to the person involved," Ford said.

Representatives John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), Robert W. Kastenmeier (D-Wis.) and Don Edwards (D-Calif.) said they were concerned about the concept of a President who could be removed from office naming his successor.

Meanwhile, the Senate Rules Committee, which previously questioned Ford, decided to vote Tuesday on Ford's nomination.