

FORD AVOIDS LOOK AT DATA REPUTED TO ABSOLVE NIXON

Apparently-Desires to Shun Too Close an Involvement in President's Defense

A CHANGE IN STRATEGY

But He Continues to Voice Confidence in Leader on First Campaign Swing

By MARJORIE HUNTER
Special to The New York Times

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Jan. 25.— Vice President Ford said today that he had decided not to examine evidence that the White House asserted would clear President Nixon of involvement in the Watergate affair and its cover-up.

His decision appears to signal a determination not to become too intimately involved in the defense of Mr. Nixon on the impeachment issue.

While continuing to express full confidence in the President, Mr. Ford has apparently abandoned his earlier and short-lived strategy of accusing those he called "a few extreme partisans" of trying to run Mr. Nixon out of office.

That was the theme he had sounded just two weeks ago in a speech to the American Farm Bureau Federation in Atlantic City. That speech, written by the White House, was delivered just hours before it was disclosed by experts that a key Watergate tape had been erased and rerecorded at least five times.

Other Developments

Meanwhile, in Washington today there were the following Watergate-related developments:

Exil Krogh Jr.'s lawyer said that Mr. Krogh had been careful not to "exonerate or imple-

cate" Mr. Nixon or anyone else in matters beyond the burglary of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

The White House confirmed that the President had met with Richard G. Danner, a Las Vegas gambler who delivered a \$100,000 payment in 1970 from

Howard Hughes to Charles G. Bohzo. The meeting was characterized as a "courtesy call" that did not touch on the Hughes money. [Page 17.]

A Federal judge asked President Nixon to tell the court personally whether he still relied on executive privilege as a defense to the Senate Watergate committee's subpoena for five White House tape recordings.

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ings. A Pentagon investigator who was involved in the 1971 inquiry into military snooping in the White House heatedly denied that he had attempted to "shake down" the President to be named director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. [Page 19.]

Two Prepared Speeches

Today, as he set out his first campaign swing since becoming Vice President, Mr. Ford carried two speeches, one prepared by the White House, the other by his own staff.

In neither prepared speech—one on behalf of a Congressional candidate in Johnstown, Pa., and the other an acceptance of an award here for "distinction in athletics and in politics"—did Mr. Ford mention the President's name.

However, he departed briefly from his prepared text in Johnstown to say that the United States was "trusted and respected" on both sides of the Iron Curtain "under the leadership of President Nixon and Henry Kissinger." While obviously determined not to raise the divisive Watergate issue in addressing crowds, Mr. Ford was questioned extensively about both Watergate and impeachment at news conferences here and in Johnstown.

He disclosed Monday in Washington that President Nixon had agreed to let him examine a tape or a document that he said the President had told him would clear Mr. Nixon of any involvement in Watergate and its cover-up.

Explains His Stand

Today, under questioning, Mr. Ford said, "On reflection, I have decided, at the present time at least, not to personally see what Senator Scott says exonerates the President."

Asked why, he replied "Because if I do, after I've seen it and I tell you I have, all my good friends in the press corps will be asking me the details. I don't want to be in the position of disclosing such evidence."

Asked why he was so certain that the evidence would clear the President, Mr. Ford replied, "I am relying on the faith and trust of Senator Hugh Scott, who I think is a man of great integrity. I am relying on the President who

also in my opinion is a man of faith and high integrity."

Mr. Ford said the "Faith" was also relying on a deposition by Bryce N. Harlow, a former White House counsel, that the material would clear the President.

The Vice President said that during a long session with Mr. Nixon on Monday he spoke to the President about the alleged evidence.

"He offered me the opportunity to see that evidence, and I said, 'Well, I'd like to think about it. I'll take your word for it' and Senator Scott's word for it. Those are two pretty good people to trust."

Mr. Scott, the Senate Republican leader, said in a nationally televised program last Sunday that he had read certain evidence that would exonerate President Nixon of any wrongdoing. White House sources subsequently said that the information would clear the President and prove false the assertions of John W. Dean 3d, a former counsel to Mr. Nixon, that the President had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up.

Mr. Ford said today that the material had been turned over to the special Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski. Sources close to Mr. Jaworski's office

have said that the prosecutor has not received information that would prove Mr. Dean's statement to be false.

The Vice President also spoke highly today of the House Judiciary Committee, which is conducting an inquiry into possible impeachment of the President. Asked if he intended to lobby against impeachment among members of the committee, Mr. Ford replied, "At the present time, I plan no lobbying effort on the impeachment issue."

A light drizzle was falling in Washington when the Vice President set out this morning on a turboprop airplane part of the White House fleet, for his long day of speechmaking and handshaking.

Friendly crowds stood in the bright sunshine in Johnstown, and later here in Columbus, as the Vice President's plane touched down. "There he is," excited spectators shouted as Mr. Ford moved through the crowd.

In Johnstown, he campaigned on behalf of Harry Fox, Republican candidate for the seat left vacant by the death of Representative John Saylor, also a Republican. The special election, to be held Feb. 5, is considered one of the key tests of what effect Watergate has had on the electorate.

Outspoken, Eh?