

F-Push 107-2874

Lick 'self-destruct' feelings,

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE (AP) — President Ford says Americans are afflicted with “self-destruct” feelings and “there’s no reason why it should be.”

That, he says, “is what we’ve got to lick.”

“We’re condemning ourselves so much we’re hurting ourselves when we should be doing just the opposite,” Ford said in an exclusive interview, his first since taking office. “There is a self-destruct kind of feeling ... That’s what we’ve got to overcome.”

The President spoke for more than an hour last Monday night with AP Special Correspondent Saul Pett on the return trip from his visit to Mexico.

In the wide-ranging interview, the President:

—Talked about “tougher measures,” if necessary, to reduce American dependence on Arab oil and said, “We could really put an embargo on foreign imports which would have a much more severe impact on availability and supply.” He said this might be necessary if Congress “failed to increase supplies,” or the public failed “to conserve.”

—Declined to call the nation’s economic problems “a recession” and said only “an international crisis of major proportions” could persuade him that wage and price controls were necessary. “I don’t see anything domestically,” he said, “that would precipitate it.”

—Predicted his wobbly “marriage” with Congress would improve after the elections. “Troops on both sides of the aisle defected in large numbers” on aid to Turkey, he said. “The leaders wanted to be helpful ... The leaders come from relatively safe districts or they aren’t up for election. Everybody else is and that makes a hell of a difference.”

—Answered detailed questions not asked by Congress about former President Richard M. Nixon’s pardon, and said there was no “conceivable” way—“none whatsoever”—that Nixon’s chief of staff could have gotten the impression Ford might favor a pardon. He said he hoped his appearance before Congress had lessened the pardon uproar.

—Declared “I love” being President, but came close to tears as he described his last, fateful meeting with then President Nixon. “He was the most controlled person. I wondered how anybody could be that controlled under those circumstances ...”

Offering a thesis that suggests Americans suffer a malaise that has grown out of a vague masochism, not

from the seeds of wrong policy or leaders who misled, Ford said, “The feeling that does worry me is this ... There is a self-destruct kind of feeling (among Americans).

“I don’t point the finger at the press or anyone. But you look at it. It sort of started when they were giving Jack Kennedy hell. You know, in the last days before the assassination ...”

Q. “They? The press?”

A. “Well, no. People in political life. I wouldn’t say the press in that case, but there was high criticism of Kennedy. And then it began really in an uphill crescendo toward LBJ and they drove him out of office, literally. Then, there was sort of a hiatus with Nixon. Then, because of Watergate, it just burst forward ...”

In a refrain reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, who said the country needs to talk less about what’s wrong with America and more about what’s right, Ford declared:

“And that’s what we’ve got to overcome. There is no reason why it should be. I don’t blame the press. I don’t blame partisanship. Somehow, we’ve gotten that attitude, that we’re condemning ourselves so much. We’re hurting ourselves when we should be doing just the opposite.”

The President brought up the possibility of an embargo on foreign oil imports and spelled out what it would take to convince him to call for wage and price controls during a discussion about the economy.

Q. “When does a recession become a recession?”

A. “Experts, economists and others, develop labels for categorizing something if one, two, three, four, five things happen. If those things happened in the traditional sense over the last ten years, you could say this was a recession or this was something else ...”

“Well, you have certain signs that by traditional criteria you’d call it a recession. Unemployment is rising; there’s a developing inventory backlog; you’ve got a cutback in consumer confidence ... On the other hand ... you’ve got extreme shortages where they can’t get materials, they can’t get employes ... So you’ve got this pulling and hauling that’s too unique at this time to use the same labels ...”

Q. “What would it take in the economy and energy situation to bring on those tougher measures you hinted at?”

A. “In energy we could really put an embargo on foreign imports which would have a much more severe impact on availability and supply.”

Q. “What would it take to do that?”

A. “The failure of the Congress or the public to respond. Congress, if it failed to increase supplies, and the public’s failure to conserve.”

Q. “Are you philosophically opposed to wage and price controls as something to be used only as a last resort? What would persuade you they were necessary?”

A. “Outside of an international crisis of major proportions—”

Q. “You see no reason to have them?”

A. “It has to be a VERY major international crisis ... I don’t see anything domestically that would precipitate it.”

After 10 weeks in office, he declared his Congressional relations to be “good”—except on the matter of aid to Turkey.

“We had the paradoxical situation where the Democratic and Republican leadership were all with me. The troops on both sides of the aisle defected in large numbers ... The leaders came from relatively safe districts or they aren’t up for election. Everybody else is and that makes a hell of a difference ...”

About his pardon of former President Nixon, Ford said the uproar it caused would have grown worse without his appearance before the House Judiciary subcommittee. “With it, I hope it’s better ...”

Q. “This question arises about your talks with Gen. (Alexander M.) Haig (Nixon’s chief of staff) Aug. 1 and 2: Did you consider him at all as any kind of an emissary from President Nixon or the Nixon White House?”

A. “No, I did not.”

Q. “As he went through the options and got to the question of a pardon of Mr. Nixon by Mr. Ford, did you have any reason to feel this was kind of a probe or feeler?”

A. “No. There was just the option that somebody over there—I don’t know who—”

Q. “Just another option?”

A. “Right.”

Q. “That somebody over there was considering? Whether that somebody was Mr. Nixon you didn’t know?”

The President shook his head.

He said he made no specific response to Gen. Haig other than to say he had to talk to Mrs. Ford—“because he put it very bluntly to me; he said, ‘Are you ready to take over the presidency?’”—and that he ought to talk to James St. Clair, White House attorney, “who had listened to or read the transcripts ... of the critical June 23rd tape ...”

Q. “Was there any kind of spontaneous, off-the-cuff, temporary sort of reaction on your part that could

Ford says

conceivably have left Haig with the impression that you might be favorable to a pardon?"

A. "None whatsoever."

A former congressman ready to quit after one more term in the House, Gerald Ford said of the presidency: "I just really love the job." He said he had been getting "a little bored" on the Hill. "Now the old adrenalin is going."

Q. "Can you tell me about that ~~last~~ long conversation you had with the President on Aug. 8?"

A. "He was the most controlled person. I wondered how anybody could be that controlled under those circumstances."