

Nixon Held Tapes Over Advice Of Laird, Harlow, Rep. Ford Says

7/28/73
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House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan said yesterday that President Nixon had withheld the tapes recordings of his White House conversations against the advice of two of his chief counselors, Melvin R. Laird and Bryce Harlow.

Ford said that Laird had told him that the President spent 10 to 12 hours listening to the tapes before reaching his decision not to release them. Neither Ford nor Harlow had heard the tapes, Ford added.

Unless Mr. Nixon makes at least selective portions of the tapes available, Ford

said, many Americans always will feel "nagging doubt" about the President's role in the Watergate cover-up.

Ford's disclosures came at a breakfast meeting during which the Michigan congressman expressed his personal confidence that the President did not have prior knowledge of the Watergate burglary or of the subsequent cover-up of White House officials.

But while the President, in Ford's view, is on "good ground" legally in his decision to withhold the tapes, "politically it was not a good move."

"His decision on the tapes,

if the mail is a reflection, has hurt the President," Ford said.

Ford took a leading role in urging that Laird, Mr. Nixon's first secretary of Defense, be brought back to the Nixon administration, principally to improve White House relations with an increasingly skeptical Congress. Ford said he had also suggested the hiring of Harlow, a veteran counselor from the Eisenhower era, who also served in Mr. Nixon's first term, as an alternative to Laird, never believing that Mr. Nixon would bring both men back into government.

See **FORD, A11, Col. 2**

