

Ford Sees Public Support Increasing For President

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Gerald R. Ford says he sees some gain in President Nixon's public support and an increased determination among the President's strong backers.

"The strong Nixon supporters have gotten stronger, and I think he has gained some with the public," Ford said in an interview. "Certainly, his supporters are more dedicated, more vigorous."

The vice president said, however, that he didn't tell Nixon of his findings at their meeting

last Thursday. "That never came up," he said.

Though he prefers it otherwise, the vice president said, "Subjectively, I suspect public opinion may have an impact" on the congressional decision on whether Nixon should be impeached and removed from office.

"I hope the decision would be predicated on the facts as they relate to a definition of an impeachable offense in the Constitution," Ford said. "That's the way the decision ought to be made."

He also said he fears Nixon's refusal to cooperate further with the House Judiciary Committee could be a factor. "I hope it isn't, but it could be," he said.

Ford has made clear he plans to continue stating his public disapproval of what he has called Nixon's stonewall attitude in dealing with the impeachment inquiry. At his request, however the interview did not include that subject.

Ford was interviewed in his cabin on the twin-engine Air Force Convair he uses for most of his shorter trips as he flew back to Washington late Sunday night for a brief Memorial Day respite at home.

Early Tuesday, he plans to hit the road again, going to

Charlotte, N.C., to play in a pro-amateur golf tournament.

His travels already have taken him some 80,000 miles into 30 states since he assumed the vice presidency last Dec. 6, and he expects to complete his circuit of all 50 states by the November congressional elections.

Asked why he is spending so much time out of Washington, Ford said "I think it is important for somebody in the administration to be out in the country."

"Somebody has to be out, I think, saying what I am saying: the President is innocent, he is doing a good job in foreign policy, fully capable mentally and physically of carrying on.

"Somebody's got to be out there speaking up," he said.

He said he has had time to perform other vice presidential chores, such as attending Cabinet and National Security meetings, being available to preside over the Senate on close votes and working with Congress for the administration's proposals.

"Last week," he said, "I think I helped a great deal in beating the three amendments to cut the defense authorization bill. I spent a great deal of time on that, talking to House members."