

F Post 9-11-74

Ford May Pardon Watergate Cast

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Ford is studying the possibility of pardoning all those convicted or accused of Watergate-related crimes, a spokesman said Tuesday.

The surprise disclosure, heightening the controversy touched off by Ford's pardon for Richard Nixon, was made by acting press secretary John Hushen, who said he spoke with Ford's express authorization.

"The question of pardons is under study," he said, adding that the review embraces all 48 individuals who have been accused of crimes associated with the Watergate label. Of the 48, 39 have pleaded guilty or been convicted by juries.

"I can give you no further guidance," Hushen said.

White House counsel Philip Buchen later told reporters he understood Ford was personally conducting the pardon study at this point but that he, Buchen, expected to be involved later.

Buchen said he believed Ford first disclosed his interest in possible broad-scale Watergate pardons at a morning meeting with Hushen and counselor Robert T. Hartmann.

Hushen was asked by a newsman if he understood the likely impact of his Ford-authorized statement on a nation already divided over the merits of the Nixon pardon.

"I think those factors have been taken into account," he said, adding that the launching of a study did not mean pardons actually would be granted.

Reaction from powerful congressional Democrats was swift and critical. Senate Democratic whip Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia said new pardons "would complete the cover-up of the cover-up." House Speaker Carl Albert, D-Okla., said they "would be viewed as an abuse of presidential power."

Sen. James L. Buckley, R-N.Y., said, however, "I certainly think it's appropriate for these cases to be reviewed. But I haven't thought it through."

Sen. Sam J. Ervin, D-N.C., Senate Watergate committee chairman, said it would be a mockery to pardon "these men who undertook to steal from the American people their right to a free election ..."

At the special Watergate prosecutor's office, spokesman James Doyle said, "I don't

think I'm surprised" that Ford would consider the pardons.

Attorneys for six defendants, in the Watergate cover-up trial conferred all morning on a joint strategy.

Hushen reported that the White House had tabulated 16,000 telegrams on the Nixon pardon by late Tuesday morning and found them running 6-1 in opposition to Ford's grant of federal immunity to the resigned president.

However, Hushen said telephone reaction had "changed

around rather significantly" and, through Monday, supported Ford's decision 5,700 to 3,900.

Buchen made public a memo of the Watergate special prosecution force which listed 10 areas, in addition to the Watergate cover-up, that could personally involve Nixon in potential prosecution.

"None of these matters at the moment rises to the level of our ability to prove even a probable criminal violation," the memo said.

It cited investigations covering matters ranging from dairy industry campaign contributions to the alleged handling of campaign contributions by Nixon's friend C. G. Rebozo "for the personal benefit of Mr. Nixon."

Buchen, recounting some of the steps that led to Nixon's pardon, tried to counter criticism from some quarters that Ford had not insisted on an admission of guilt by Nixon. The White House lawyer said he told Ford acceptance of a pardon "could be accepted as an admission of guilt — there is no other reason for granting a pardon."

Asked if they had considered seeking a plea from Nixon to at least one criminal charge prior to a pardon, Buchen said the former President's attorney, Herbert J. Miller, seemed certain "there would never be a plea."

Buchen also was asked if circumstances might suggest there had been a Ford-Nixon pardon deal.

"I can assure you he (Ford) did not make a deal," he said.

Hushen said Ford knew the Nixon pardon, announced Sunday, "was going to be a con-

troversial decision but believes he did the right thing and is confident the public will reach the same conclusion in the long run.

The spokesman said that while he couldn't inject himself into Ford's "thinking processes," he felt that the question of Nixon's mental and physical health was "getting undue attention" as a possible motivation for the pardon.

However, Hushen added that "a reasonable man could conclude" that a person's health might be impaired if a threat of prosecution hung over his head.

Buchen said that when he first told Nixon's lawyer, Miller, that Ford was considering granting a pardon, the two attorneys agreed it would be "very beneficial" to the country if Nixon would provide "as full a statement as possible" on his involvement in the Watergate scandal.

Buchen said Nixon's Sunday statement, in which he expressed remorse but admitted no guilt, was felt to meet this standard under the circumstances.

He said Miller was told from the outset that a pardon would not depend on an admission of guilt by the resigned President.

Both Buchen and Hushen said they felt Ford's decision to study the possibility of other Watergate pardons should have no impact on the trial of six former administration and campaign aides on cover-up charges, scheduled to begin Sept. 30.