

President Orders Review Of Draft Amnesty Issue

Chicago

President Ford told the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention yesterday that he has ordered a review of the whole question of amnesty for desertion and draft dodging to enable 50,000 offenders "to work their way back home."

Without announcing de-

tails of new policy, he said that he intends "to bind up the nation's wounds" and will throw "the weight of my presidency into the scales of U.S. justice on the side of leniency."

The President said that while he rejects blanket amnesty he also rejects revenge and will act prompt-

ly, fairly and firmly in the same spirit that guided Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman."

In a dramatic and unexpected break with President Richard Nixon's assertion that he would "never" approve amnesty, the new President announced that he had directed Attorney General William B. Saxbe and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger to propose recommendations for a new policy before September 1.

"I will then decide how best to deal with the different kinds of cases," Mr. Ford said. "There are differences. Decisions of my administration will make any future penalties fit the seriousness of the individual's mistakes."

The 3000 VFW members sat in stunned silence as the President read his statement on amnesty. It had not been part of the advance text distributed to newsmen aboard the plane en route here from Washington.

The VFW, like other veterans groups, has steadfastly opposed any amnesty.

There was loud applause when the President recalled that he had often stated his opposition to "unconditional blanket amnesty for anyone who illegally evaded or fled military service."

Members of the audience did not react critically but listened somberly and non-committally to the President's sharp break from Nixon administration policy on one of the most delicate issues before him.

Referring to the 50,000 Americans charged with vio-

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lations of the Selective Service Act or the Code of Military Justice during the Vietnam war, Mr. Ford called them "casualties still abroad or absent without leave from the real America."

"I want them to come home, if they want to work their way back," he said. "These young Americans should have a second chance to contribute their fair share to the rebuilding of peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

The President won prolonged applause when he concluded and was interrupted many times in other parts of the address.

His announcement that he would nominate Richard L. Roudebush, 56, former Republican member of Congress from Indiana and deputy administrator of the Veterans Administration, as

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the troubled agency's new director drew particularly enthusiastic applause.

If confirmed by the Senate, Roudebush will succeed Donald Johnson, who has resigned under fire.

Mr. Ford also announced his dissatisfaction with the pending veterans education bill, which would provide an increase of 23 per cent in veterans education benefits and extend eligibility from four to five years.

"America is fighting for its economic life," the President declared. "I will not hesitate to use the veto to control inflationary excesses."

Appealing to Congress to give him a bill he could sign, the President said he is open to "conciliation and compromise."

Mr. Ford promised better administration of the Veterans Administration to avoid "arrogance or indifference to any individual."

"I don't like red tape," he said, and added in a reference to the Nixon administration's difficulties with taped conversations:

"As a matter of fact, I don't like any kind of tapes."

The President drove into Chicago from the airport instead of using a helicopter, as recent presidents often did in order to avoid the long drive. When he neared the downtown area and sizable crowds, he stood in the open back seat and waved.

Mrs. Ford sat beside him.

Once the President stopped the motorcade to shake hands with a group of well-wishers.