

## A softer stand

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Ford will unveil a conditional amnesty program next week requiring repatriated Vietnam war resisters to serve six to 24 months of alternative service, according to administration sources.

The minimum period of service is sharply lower than the 18 months originally proposed by the Defense and Justice Departments.

The length of time a military deserter or draft evader devotes to alternative service will depend in part on his military or selective service record, one source said.

In the case of deserters, for example, such factors as length of time in service before desertion and whether a man served in Vietnam would be considered.

Postponements of the plan's announcement fueled speculation that it was being delayed or revamped as a result of Ford's pardon to former President Nixon.

But administration officials say the conditional amnesty program was not developed in concert with or reaction to the Nixon pardon.

"No one is naive about that linkage, least of all the President," said one official. "But the amnesty program is being handled on its own merits."

As many as 50,000 draft evaders and military deserters could be affected, an estimated several thousand of them living abroad.

The alternative service they perform is expected to be in such tasks as hospital work and forest conservation, typical jobs filled in the past by conscientious objectors in lieu of military service.