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Go ahead on impeachment probe: Ford

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford says the House should go ahead with its investigation to determine whether President Nixon should be impeached.

The Michigan congressman said he doubts there are grounds for impeachment, but conceded the basis for such action can be anything a majority of the House considers it to be.

"The House of Representatives should proceed with consideration of impeachment to help clear the air," Ford told the Senate Rules Committee yesterday as the panel opened televised hearings into his nomination to

succeed Spiro T. Agnew as vice president.

The public hearings will resume Monday with more testimony from Ford and from members of Congress, who generally have praised the selection of Ford, a House member for 25 years and Republican leader for nine.

In four hours of testimony, Ford:

- Said it might have been better had the White House disclosed earlier that two of the nine tapes subpoenaed in the Watergate investigation did not exist. The disclosure was made Wednesday.

- Said that on issues of executive privilege, a President should seek a balance

between confidentiality and the public's right to know.

- Denied being a conduit for dairy - industry contributions to members of Congress.

- Denounced as lies allegations by former lobbyist Robert N. Winter - Berger that Winter - Berger gave Ford \$15,000 to pay Mrs. Ford's medical bills.

- Repeated that he will not be a candidate for any political office in 1976.

Ford expressed the hope that some of the damage caused by Nixon's handling of the Watergate case can be repaired by the choice of Sen. William B. Saxbe (R-Ohio) for attorney general and Leon Jaworski for

Watergate prosecutor as well as the surrender of Watergate tapes.

Ford, who made no apologies for being a strong Nixon supporter, said that on at least two occasions he had recommended to top-level White House aides that the President turn over the tapes to the courts to see if the recordings could shed some light on any presidential involvement in the scandal.

Nixon agreed to yield the tapes last week and only after firing Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, a move that resulted in the resignation of Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and brought a flood of calls for Nixon's impeachment.