

PUBLIC FIGURES are keenly aware that what they say under one set of circumstances may one day return—often out of context or otherwise warped by time and re-telling—to haunt them. Such has been the case of Vice President Ford for the several months since he was named by President Nixon to become the new vice president. When Mr. Ford was the minority leader of the House, he mounted a celebrated and unsuccessful campaign to have Justice William O. Douglas removed from the Supreme Court. In a speech on the House floor, Mr. Ford said at the time that an impeachable offense is “whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers (it) to be at a given moment in history.”

Quite naturally, when Mr. Ford became President Nixon's choice for vice president, that definition was unearthed from the 1970 debate on Mr. Justice Douglas. On its face, the quotation seems to suggest that Mr. Ford's view of the grounds for impeachment was once extremely broad, at least when it applied to Justice Douglas. In fairness to Mr. Ford—and For Your Information—it should be pointed out that Representative Ford said

more than that one sentence about impeachable offenses, although the second part of his statement on the subject has been all but lost in the current impeachment debate. “The President and Vice President,” Mr. Ford also said in the 1970 debate, “can be thrown out of office by the voters at least every four years. To remove them in mid-term . . . would indeed require crimes of the magnitude of treason and bribery.”

Unfortunately for Mr. Ford, that elaboration appears one paragraph after his pungent and simple definition, and has been obscured and usually ignored when the first sentence is used. Although the Vice President himself has tried to correct the record recently, he has not always succeeded in getting the two statements fastened together, as they were at the time he made his speech. Since the record of the debate on the impeachment of the President is already laden with incomplete statements, it would be good if Mr. Ford's definition of impeachable offenses was passed along in full, instead of being partially conveyed.