

Ford urged to plan for quick takeover

By Saul Friedman
Knight News Service

WASHINGTON — Vice President Ford's closest advisers and friends are quietly urging him to make plans now for a new administration in the event he suddenly assumes the presidency.

Ford, extremely sensitive about making any overt move that would undercut President Nixon, has so far resisted the suggestions.

Nevertheless, some of Ford's most trusted staff people have discussed among themselves, if not with the Vice President, the need for him to grasp the reins of government quickly and firmly.

If President Nixon resigns or is removed from office, a Ford associate said, "the problems of transition will be unique and difficult."

If Ford becomes President suddenly, a source said, "he will need to move quickly to re-establish confidence in the presidency, to do something about many problems which have been neglected because of Watergate, and to show — at home and abroad — that the government and its policies are in firm hands. These things will be more important than in any other transition in the nation's history."

Ford's advisers, in their work with agencies and the administration's legislative program, have heard complaints about the appointments that have gone unfulfilled and the decisions that have gone unmade because of White House preoccupation with Watergate.

"There are perhaps 100 top level jobs vacant," said one of Ford's staff men. "It's difficult to recruit good people in this atmosphere, but they are needed so that key policy decisions can be made.

"I know of many pieces of

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legislation on which the administration has no position, because there is no one with the responsibility of giving the administration's position. On some proposals there are many different positions because no one is doing any coordinating. And within some agencies there are backlogs of proposals which need the approval of the White House."

After Ford was nominated to the vice presidency, in October, advisers suggested he begin organizing his new office.

But rather than take anything for granted and risk problems in Congress, he waited until after he was confirmed, Dec. 6, to put together a staff of advisers and speechwriters.

As a result, his aides say, his initial vice presidential operation was chaotic and too dependent on the White House staff, which sought to make Ford a close ally.

"We want to avoid that kind of chaos if the presidency is suddenly thrust upon us," said a Ford aide.

Ford, however, has insisted he should in no way seem to expect becoming President. And privately, as well as publicly, he genuinely hopes that the President, a friend from the time they were both in the House of Representatives, serves his full term.

Despite this feeling, Ford increasingly is expressing deep concern over the weakness of Nixon's presidency.

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