

SFChronicle

JUN 24 1974

What Ford Won and Lost In California

By George Murphy
Chronicle Correspondent

Monterey

Vice President Gerald R. Ford left here last night, concluding a 3½-day California tour that got him, at best, mixed reviews.

Ford began the swing on a high note, getting full marks for a San Diego speech Thursday in which he called for an end to the "domestic



impasse" generated by Watergate.

The National Jaycees convention exploded in applause when Ford said "we must also renew our sense of morality from the highest levels of government to the most remote corners of inner-city streets."

The roseate glow lasted less than 24 hours.

The next morning in Los Angeles, the vice president made what quickly became known as his "big difference" statement — one he obviously wishes he had not made.

But he did say it, and in politics particularly the spoken word is as irrevocable as a haircut.

In commenting on Charles Colson's statement in court that President Nixon had ordered him to spread damaging information about Daniel Ellsberg, Ford said in a television interview:

"There is a big difference between telling Chuck Colson to smear Ellsberg and ordering, allegedly ordering, a break-in."

It was not until almost four hours later that Ford dispatched his press secretary to tell the press aboard Air Force Two that the vice president does not condone

smear tactics.

Then on Saturday Ford held a press conference to give a "clarification" of his comments.

Here again, a political maxim: "If you have to 'clarify' you shouldn't have made the statement in the first place.

No one questioned Ford's comment that his own reputation shows he does not stoop to smearing anyone's reputation. But that, of course, is not the point.

While his decency is obvious, his naivete is only slightly less so.

For example, speaking of Mr. Nixon's gift of a helicopter worth several million dollars to Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, Ford said: "It's traditional to exchange gifts."

And again, during the "big difference" taping, Ford defended his almost constant journeying around the nation as being beneficial because "I get to talk to Americans face-to-face, hear what they have to say, what message they want to send to Washington."

But during his California stay, the only public appearance Ford made was before the Jaycees. The rest of the time was spent at a private

cocktail reception with big money Republicans in San Francisco; at a private dinner for 30, also in San Francisco; at a private luncheon with more GOP heavy contributors in Los Angeles, then at Cypress Point for two days of golf.

At his Saturday press conference, Ford was obviously nettled when a reporter, noting the vice president makes a point of shaking hands at each airport with the policemen who served as his motorcade escorts asked:

"Isn't it true that most of your time in California has been spent with checkbook Republicans and cops at airports?"

"I must respectfully disagree with both the tenor and content of your question," the vice president said unsmilingly.