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Ford Links Court Test, Impeachment

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Vice President Ford yesterday predicted that the House probably would impeach President Nixon if he refused to follow a Supreme Court order to give subpoenaed tapes to Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

The Vice President added that he hopes Mr. Nixon will comply with the Supreme Court's decision, which is expected before the House impeachment vote, but he defended the President's refusal to pledge in advance to follow whatever ruling the court makes.

Ford's comments came in an interview with columnist William F. Buckley Jr. taped for telecast Sunday evening on the Public Broadcast Service program "Firing Line."

Ford told Buckley that he expects the House Judiciary Committee to report a bill of

impeachment by a narrow margin, regardless of the Supreme Court outcome.

"As of the moment," Ford said, "there aren't enough votes in the House to impeach the President." But if Mr. Nixon were to flout the Supreme Court he said, "Then it's a totally different ball game."

"It then becomes an institutional conflict," Ford said, and the House would be more likely to vote for impeachment. But, he contended, "I don't think there is sufficient evidence" for impeachment on any of the direct Watergate charges.

Ford said he sympathized with Mr. Nixon's reluctance to turn over more tapes. He described the House Judiciary Committee as "the leakiest

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committee in the history of the U.S. Congress."

In response to other questions, Ford declined to take a stand on presidential pardons for White House "plumbers" who might be convicted of criminal acts they viewed as proper delegations of presidential authority.

"Any President under his constitutional authority as commander in chief can order certain rather drastic actions," Ford said, "including a break-in." But he said he doubted whether the burglary of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office fitted that definition.