

Ford Offers to Air Tapes With Nixon

By Jules Witcover

President Ford says he "would be delighted" to make public any tape recordings of conversations between himself and former President Nixon to substantiate that there was no deal on Mr. Ford's pardon of his predecessor.

The President expressed his willingness, assuming only that there would be no legal difficulty with the Watergate special prosecutor, in an impromptu interview with five pool reporters aboard Air Force One Saturday night as he returned from a day of campaigning in North and South Carolina and Kentucky. Under White House rules, the interview was not to be made public until 6:30 p.m. yesterday.

It is not known whether any Ford-Nixon tapes exist that would shed

light on the Sept. 8 pardon or on any other pos-

ible role Mr. Ford may have played in circumstances leading to the resignation of Mr. Nixon on Aug. 9.

But the question came up last Thursday when the President testified before a House Judiciary subcommittee on his reasons for the pardon, and he had not answered it.

The automatic tape system installed in the Nixon White House was disclosed by White House aide Alexander P. Butterfield at Senate Watergate committee hearings on July 16, 1973, and reportedly was dismantled shortly thereafter.

On a Sept. 15, 1972, White House tape already made public Mr. Nixon suggested to then White House counsel John W. Dean III that then House Minority Leader Ford be asked to solicit the help of Rep. William B. Widnall (R-N.J.), a ranking member of the House Banking Committee headed by Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.), to steer the Patman committee off a Water-

gate inquiry. Any Ford-Nixon tapes conceivably could shed light on that matter.

During his testimony Thursday, Mr. Ford was asked specifically by Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) about making Ford-Nixon tapes public. The question was one of a volley that she posed, without waiting for reply.

The President said aboard Air Force One Saturday night that he wished he had had an opportunity to answer Rep. Holtzman's questions, but added that she didn't give him a chance. "She didn't ask them," the President said, she "just recited them. I would

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have been delighted to answer any of the others if I had time."

Mr. Ford said he did not wish to interrupt and appear rude to Rep. Holtzman but felt obliged to interrupt once, when she asked about a deal on the pardon, to categorically

say there had been none.

Asked whether he now thought Congress would be satisfied with his responses on the pardon, which he said he extended primarily to focus national attention onto more pressing matters, the President answered: "I don't know, but Congress had its opportunity and I really believe I answered any questions . . . I certainly answered anything they asked . . . I certainly hope it has (satisfied them). I don't know what more they would want to know."

On a related Watergate matter, Mr. Ford said he has received "no recommendation or name" from Attorney General William B. Saxbe on a successor to Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, whose resignation is effective Oct. 25. Jaworski has recommended his chief deputy, Henry S. Ruth Jr. and a White House spokesman has said Ruth will receive serious consideration.

Asked whether any conservative Republicans had asked him to withdraw the nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller to be Vice President, Mr. Ford replied: "I wouldn't say anybody seriously." (One Republican, Sen. William Scott of Virginia, has publicly called for that action.) "I'm still convinced he would make a good Vice President," Mr. Ford said.

He said he saw no connection between the nomination's difficulties over Rockefeller's huge gifts to friends, employees and charities, and a post-Watergate heightened sense of public morality.

"Watergate was a cover-up," the President said. "Everything that's come out about Nelson Rockefeller has been open . . . It's a pretty stringent standard (required for confirmation. I ought to know. . . One can't help but wonder how many people on either side of the aisle can undergo this kind of scrutiny. It's pretty rugged. . . I know how he feels. I had the same delay."

The President said "I wouldn't think" the delay in Rockefeller's confirmation would affect his plans to go to Japan later this year, because he expects Rockefeller to be confirmed by then.

Congress will take up the nomination again after it returns from the current election recess.

During the confirmation proceedings, Mr. Ford said, he has not spoken to Speaker of the House Carl Albert, who

remains next in line of succession until a new Vice President is confirmed. But the President emphasized that special intelligence and other briefings are available to Albert, as well as use of Air Force Two, a presidential backup plane. Mr. Ford said he understands Albert will use it to campaign this fall, with the Democratic National Committee paying for its use, just as the Republican National Committee pays for Air Force One when the President uses it for political travel.

Mr. Ford sought to knock down speculation about imminent changes in the Cabinet he inherited from Mr. Nixon. "I haven't told anybody on my staff about Cabinet changes," he said, and if anyone has been spreading rumors it would have to be "either somebody outside who alleges they're influential" or a lower-echelon staff person.

Mr. Ford expressed optimism on the Boston school desegregation crisis and defended his refusal to send in federal troops. "What was done by the governor (Frank Sargent) apparently eased the situation," he said. "I don't think us sending in the 82d Airborne Division would have done any good . . .

"We followed the right decision. It seemed to work" Mr. Ford also praised the National Guard in Massachusetts, which Sargent alerted and held in readiness. The Guard, the President said, seemed to have a "high degree of capability. It was well-trained and well-equipped to meet any emergency, which made it easier for me."

Concerning the long-range solution on situations like the one that developed in Boston over a court order to use busing as a school desegregation tool, the President said: "That's for the judge to decide. He's made the order. He has to do what he thinks is right under the decisions of the supreme Court." At his last regular press conference, Mr. Ford said he disagreed with the decision in the Boston case.

The President, who goes to Mexico today for a series of meetings with Mexican President Luis Echeverria, said the two leaders will discuss the drug traffic problem, immigration, oil and seven or eight other matters.