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Ford: Made Right Decision On Nixon, No Secret Deals

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Ford declared Monday night he is absolutely convinced he made the right decision in pardoning a “shamed and disgraced” Richard M. Nixon. He said there were no secret deals and no secret reasons for the pardon.

And Ford added that the former president’s acceptance of the pardon can be construed as an admission of Watergate guilt.

“I must say that the decision has created more antagonism than I anticipated,” Ford acknowledged at a White House news conference. But he said it was right for the nation, for the sake of national healing and unity.

“... As I look over the long haul with a trial or several trials of a former president, criminal trials, the possibility of a former president being in the dock so to speak, and the divisions that would have existed ... I’m still convinced that despite the public reaction so far that the decision I made was the right one.”

Again and again at the nationally broadcast and televised news conference, the question-

ing turned to the pardon, and Ford defended it.

“... I had no secret reason,” he said at the outset. Nor, said Ford, did he have inside information on Nixon’s health — although he was not oblivious to reports that the former president was ailing.

And later, Ford said there were no private deals:

“There was no understanding, no deal between me and the former president nor

between my staff and the staff of the former president, none whatsoever.”

Instead, Ford said, there was his concern that Nixon would be indicted for obstructing justice and possibly 10 other counts, that the proceedings would drag out for well over a year, and that they would worsen the national wounds of Watergate.

“It seemed to me that as

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long as this divisiveness continued, this turmoil existed, caused by the charges and countercharges, the responsible people in the government could not give their total attention to the problems that we had to solve,” Ford said.

Ford, who as vice president said he did not believe Nixon had committed an impeachable offense, acknowledged that the unanimous finding of the House Judiciary Committee “is very persuasive evidence” that he had.

“Was the acceptance of the pardon by the president an admission of guilt?” Ford said. “The acceptance of a pardon, I think, can be construed by many, if not all, as an admission of guilt.”

On other major points:

—Ford said tape recordings and documents of the Nixon years are still at the White House, and will be available for use as evidence in Watergate trials. While they are deemed to belong to Nixon, Ford said they will be available under subpoena for any criminal proceeding.

Ford said his staff is working with aides to Watergate special prosecutor Leon Jaworski to alleviate any concern in Jaworski’s office about the tapes’ availability as evidence. “I hope a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out,” he said.

—The President declared, “Let me say very strongly that the United States is not going to have a depression.” He said the over-all U.S. economy is strong, and employment is high, despite the problem of inflation. “We are going to work to make sure that our economy improves in the months ahead,” Ford said.

—Ford said the United States was not involved in the military overthrow of the government of Salvador Allende as president of Chile, despite recent disclosure that the CIA financed covert operations there.