

Ford Curbs Tax Return, Job Abuses

9-21-74
By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Ford yesterday ordered two reform actions designed to end abuses charged against the Nixon administration.

He directed all departments and agency heads to support the merit system in the government to keep the civil service free from politics.

And he signed an executive order limiting White House access to income tax returns.

Some advisers are known to have tried to dissuade Mr. Ford from issuing his defense of the merit system at this time because it would further discredit his predecessor, who has been charged with attempting to circumvent the Civil Service Commission to gain political control of hiring in the government.

However, the President's order directly referred to the crisis the government went through during the Watergate controversy by declaring that "recent experience has proven one thing about the federal government: it can continue to function and move ahead even under the most difficult circumstances.

This is because more than two million career civil servants "gave of themselves in a thoroughly dedicated and efficient manner to assure this continuity," Mr. Ford said.

He said he intended to see that the civil service remains free from political considerations.

"Appointments and promotions in the career service must not be made on the basis of either politics, race, creed or sex," Mr. Ford said in his memo to agency heads.

He said he had informed the chairman of the Civil Service Commission of his "determination to keep the federal career service just that—a career service in which men and women can be

accepted in the first place on their ability and promoted on their merit."

In the executive order, the President said that only he could direct the disclosure of any tax return to a member of the White House staff. If he decides a staff member needs such access, the President will designate in writing the staff member authorized to see the return.

In a reference to charges that the Nixon administration abused the tax system for political purposes, deputy press secretary John W. Hushen said of Mr. Ford's decision:

"I think he's seen what happened in the past and he wants to make sure it doesn't happen in the future, at least while he is in the White House."

The Watergate investigation disclosed that Nixon staff aides examined income tax returns. The new order requires that the President personally specify in writing to the Secretary of the Treasury the returns desired and personally designate in writing the person authorized to see a return on the President's behalf.

The order is a companion measure to a bill prepared last week by the Treasury Department restricting access by other federal agencies to tax returns. Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.) and Rep. Jerry Litton (D-Mo.), co-sponsors of tougher legislation on tax confidentiality, have criticized the administration package as insufficient to prevent

future abuse.

In a joint statement, Weicker and Litton said executive orders are "a first step" but that "presidential accessibility to the confidential tax return of American citizens is better preserved by statute." They said an executive order can be "changed, revoked or disregarded."

At his press conference Monday, Mr. Ford said that by

See PRESIDENT, A6, Col. 1

PRESIDENT, From A1

tradition a President has a right of access to tax returns.

In other actions:

- The President accepted an invitation from President Park Chung Hee of South Korea to visit the country Nov. 22 and 23, immediately after his three-day visit to Japan.

- Rep. Donald M. Fraser (D-Minn.), declaring that the trip "carries some grave risks for U.S. policy," called on the President to tell Park of "the growing concern Americans have about destruction of democracy in Korea."

In defending the President's action, Hushen said that South Korea is "a long-standing ally and the U.S. has important security interests in the area."

- The White House announced that Australian

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam will confer with the President here Oct. 4.

- The President said he would nominate Daniel Minchew of Baxley, Ga., now an administrative assistant to Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.), as a member of the Tariff Commission.

- The President will nominate Clyde S. DuPont, minority counsel of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, to be a member of the Postal Rate Commission.

- The President appointed William E. Casselman II, 33, who was his legal counsel when he was Vice President, to be counsel to the President. He will work under Philip W. Buchen, who has the same title with cabinet rank. Phillip E. Areeda also has the title of counsel.