

Ford Expects Nixon-Hill Cooperation

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Vice President Gerald R. Ford said yesterday that he has "reason to believe" that President Nixon will cooperate with the House Judiciary Committee in providing relevant documents the panel seeks as part of its impeachment inquiry.

Ford added, however, "I hope that the House committee doesn't make the mistake the Senate committee, the Ervin committee, made when they demanded 700 documents.

"That was a fishing expedition," he said in an interview, "and ever since the committee made that ridiculous request the committee's public relations have been literally zero."

He was referring to the Senate Watergate committee headed by Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.).

"I don't think that the President should just turn the latch key on the White House and say 'come in here and ransack all the files,'" Ford said.

"Now I think the President will, I hope he will, I have reason to believe he will, be cooperative on relative material to the specific charges that are defined for impeachment under the Constitution."

Saturday Ford was questioned during a Phoenix, Ariz., news conference about the indictment of seven former White House and campaign officials, as well as the contents of a sealed report that a grand jury turned over to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica. Sources say the report contains information about President Nixon's possible involvement in the cover-up.

The Vice President said the sealed report should be turned

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over to the Judiciary Committee, because that panel was the "proper place" to consider the President's involvement or non-involvement in the cover-up.

In yesterday's interview, Ford repeated his earlier contention that any impeachment action that might be brought against Mr. Nixon must be based on an indictable offense, a criminal violation of law.

The Democratic and Republican chief counsels advising the House committee have agreed that a broad interpretation can be made of impeachable grounds such as misuse of the powers of the office of the President, even though such misuse would not constitute a criminal violation.

"I respectfully disagree with the counsel for the House committee and I hasten to point out that a very serious study in this same area by the Department of Justice also differed with the House committee staff study," Ford said.

Meanwhile, Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), Democratic whip, said the indictment of former top presidential aides posed "serious implications" for President Nixon and brought the Watergate cover-up conspiracy into the Oval Office for the first time.

Byrd added that any refusal by President Nixon to turn over Watergate evidence to the House Judiciary Committee could in itself be grounds for impeachment. Byrd was interviewed on "Meet the Press" (NBC, WRC).