

FORD CONCERNED BY GESELL ACTION

Possible Contempt Citation
of Nixon Held Major Issue

By MARJORIE HUNTER

Special to The New York Times

RALEIGH, N.C., June 7. — Vice President Ford said today that the possibility that President Nixon might be cited for contempt of court "is a matter of major consequences."

Mr. Ford also said there could be "argument both ways" on whether contempt of court is an impeachable offense.

"I would not pass judgment on that at this point," he said.

The Vice President's comments came at an impromptu news conference here about two hours after Judge Gerhard A. Gesell said in Washington that Mr. Nixon's refusal to provide evidence sought in the trial of John D. Ehrlichman, a former White House assistant, "borders on obstruction of justice. I can't tolerate it."

Asked to comment on the possibility that Judge Gesell might cite the President for contempt of court, Mr. Ford replied:

"I don't think I should comment on a matter as serious as that, based on a second-hand report. This is a matter of major consequence and I'll defer until I've had an opportunity to read firsthand what did take place."

Apparently Disturbed

He appeared somewhat disturbed throughout the news conference. He did not engage in light banter as he often does when questioned by reporters.

One major disclosure bearing on possible impeachment has been that a Watergate grand jury, voting 19 to 0 several months ago, had named Mr. Nixon as an "unindicted co-conspirator" in the Watergate cover-up.

Asked today if anything that had happened in the last few days had shaken his faith in Mr. Nixon, Mr. Ford replied tersely: "None whatsoever."

Mr. Ford noted that the grand jury action was of a "lower consequence" legally and "has less impact" than an indictment.

"I don't consider this action by the grand jury as anything of a serious nature," he said, "because the action that will be taken in the case of the President will be taken by the House Committee on the Judiciary and I trust they will make their own independent finding and not rely on the action of the grand jury."

Asked if he would have resigned if he had been named an unindicted co-conspirator, Mr. Ford replied: "I would not."

He also said he did not feel

that Mr. Nixon "has placed himself above the law," and contended that the President has the right to use "all appropriate legal methods" that he and his attorneys deem proper.

The Vice President managed to fit the unscheduled news conference into a day during which he went from Washington to Georgia, North Carolina and Utah for appearances.

Both in Savannah, Ga., where he addressed the Georgia Bar Association this morning, and in Raleigh, where he addressed a high school graduating class, Mr. Ford spoke of the need for morality in government.

In the bar association address, he noted that public opinion polls had shown dismay by the people over "unsavory political campaign practices" and failures of elected officials.