

Ford Expects Impeachment

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HATTIESBURG, Miss.,

Aug. 3—Vice President Ford said today that President Nixon's support in the House of Representatives has slipped considerably and he may be impeached.

Unless there is some change, Ford said, "I suspect the odds are such" that Mr. Nixon may be impeached.

Later, in New Orleans, Ford was asked again about the President's prospects on impeachment. "I think the situation has eroded," he said, "and the possibility is

the vote will be unfavorable for the President."

In reply to questions, the Vice President said that if the House fails to exonerate Mr. Nixon, he would prefer censure over impeachment.

He stressed, however, that he still believes Mr. Nixon is innocent "of any impeachable offenses."

He conceded to reporters that the situation in the House has "eroded" significantly. . . . I think the odds are changed."

As recently as June 15, Ford was saying that he was certain the House would not impeach the President because "there just isn't any

evidence." Almost a week ago, the House Judiciary Committee completed deliberations and voted three articles of impeachment, sending them to the House floor.

The Vice President campaigned today through Mississippi and Louisiana for Republican candidates for Congress.

In speeches in Columbus, Jackson and Hattiesburg, Ford made no reference to Mr. Nixon's impeachment troubles, instead extolling his foreign policy accomplishments. But on two occasions, in response to ques-

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tions, Ford reaffirmed his belief in Mr. Nixon's innocence, and at an airport news conference here said for the first time that he thinks Mr. Nixon may be impeached.

Ford, who has been getting much advice to tone down or cut out entirely his vocal defense of the President, said he did not intend to leave the impression he was heeding that advice.

But his speeches before the moderate-to-large crowds suggested a policy decision may have been made to tone down the defense of Mr. Nixon. The reaffirmations of Mr. Nixon's innocence came at a small private state Republican Party luncheon in Jackson and at the airport press conference at which only a small audience was present.

Asked about his own steadfastness in support of the President, Ford said: "I believe the President is innocent. I don't want any impression created that I've changed my mind about the President's innocence."

Ford again charged that there is a "hard core" of partisans among the Democrats in Congress working for impeachment.

Today's trip was being watched closely to see how the Vice President would respond to criticism in recent days that he was damaging his credibility by carrying the President's fight and attacking Democrats who voted for articles of im-



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Vice President Ford campaigns for GOP candidates at Jackson, Miss., airport rally.

peachment on the Judiciary Committee.

At the Jackson luncheon, Ford repeated his accusation that at least eight of the committee's Democrats, who last year had voted against Ford's confirmation as Vice President, were acting out of partisanship. Critics have said Ford has damaged his potential to be a unifier, should he become President, by such remarks

and there has been pressure on him to desist.

Turning to the nation's economy, Ford said in Columbus:

"I can assure that the federal government from the President on down are launching the best possible plan for controlling the evils of inflation."

He did not spell out what that plan was but said that "the government has as its best weapon the responsible handling of our federal fiscal affairs." Ford noted Mr.

Nixon's pledge to cut federal spending and reduce the number of federal employees, and he predicted such steps will "make headway . . . against the ravages of inflation."

The Republican candidate in the second congressional district, the Columbus area of Mississippi, is a former state senator, Ben Hilden. In the fourth congressional district of Jackson, the candidate is the incumbent Rep. Thad Cochran.

On the question of House censure, Ford said at the airport news conference, "If I had my druthers, I'd rather have the House vote the facts as I see them and vote for acquittal—but if

you have no alternative to impeachment but censure, then I would favor censure."

A resolution to censure Mr. Nixon rather than impeach him was introduced in the House Friday, and GOP leaders, including Minority Leader John J. Rhodes of Arizona, joined the petition effort to provide an alternative to impeachment.

Rhodes, who said he was not taking a stand, is slated to announce Monday whether he will vote for or against impeachment.

In Washington, D.C., Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield told reporters Ford was "in a delicate situation" and he found no fault with the Vice President's defense of Mr. Nixon.