

Ford Won't Talk About Impeachment Anymore

Washington

Vice President Gerald R. Ford, the man who would succeed President Nixon if he were removed from office, took himself out of the impeachment debate yesterday.

It would do no good to repeat statements that Mr. Nixon is not guilty of any

impeachable offense, Ford said.

Ford said he was flying back to Washington from New Orleans when he learned of Mr. Nixon's statement that he had concealed information about Watergate. Ford said he had not listened to the tapes of the three conversations that Mr. Nixon released.

In a statement, Ford said:

"The public interest is no longer served by repetition of my previously expressed belief that, on the basis of all the evidence known to me and the American people, the President is not guilty of an impeachable offense under the Constitution, which specifies treason, bribery, high crimes

and misdemeanors.

"Inasmuch as additional evidence is about to be forthcoming from the President—which he says may be damaging—I intend to respectfully decline to discuss impeachment matters in public or in response to questions until the matters are more fully available."

In a tacit acknowledgment

that the House is likely to pass articles of impeachment, Ford said, "The whole truth should be the objective of the trial before the Senate."

He said he would be relieved of his presiding duties in an impeachment trial and, since Andrew Johnson

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had no vice president, "there are no precedents to guide me except my own common sense and my conscience."

"Both tell me to let my

widely known views on the impeachment issue stand until I have reason to change them and to refuse further comment at this time."

Ford said he promised Congress when he was ap-

pointed he would be a "calm communicator and ready conciliator" but, he said, "The President and the Congress are now in an adversary relationship."

"The business of government must go on and the

genuine needs of the people must be served. I believe I can make a better contribution to this end by not involving myself in an impeachment debate in which I have no constitutional role."

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