

Ford Pictured as 'on an Extremely Difficult Spot'

By MARJORIE HUNTER

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 6 —

Vice President Ford appeared unnaturally solemn today as he moved rapidly through a schedule that took him from the Capitol to the White House and back again to the Capitol.

Occasionally as crowds pressed toward him, he flashed one of his cheery smiles, but much of the time he appeared preoccupied, as if suddenly aware that within days or weeks or months he might become President of the United States.

If he had any such idea, he carefully avoided mentioning it publicly. He brushed aside reporters without a word. He left a Senate Republican luncheon when the conversation turned to discussion of President Nixon's gravely deteriorating support in Congress.

"Jerry's bending over backward to dissociate himself from any comment that might be misinterpreted," Senator John G. Tower, Republican of Texas, said later. "He's on an extremely difficult spot right now."

The Vice President's day began early — as it always does — when he had breakfast at the Capitol with eight young Republican members of the House.

The breakfast meeting was set up a few weeks ago by the eight Republicans, who were eager to air their com-

plaints about President Nixon's economic policies.

"We felt that his [Mr. Nixon's] speech on the economy out in Los Angeles wasn't as strong as we'd have liked to have heard," Representative Clarence J. Brown, Republican of Ohio, explained later. "We wanted the Vice President to know about our concerns."

Mr. Brown said that impeachment of President Nixon or his resignation was not mentioned at the breakfast. However, others at the gathering said that the matter was discussed briefly, and that Mr. Ford appeared fully aware of the gravity of the President's situation.

One said that he got the "distinct impression" that Mr. Ford was prepared to assume the Presidency in the event Mr. Nixon resigned or was forced out of office.

Makes Second Trip

Mr. Ford has scheduled a speech at a downtown hotel to an agriculture and conservation gathering. He abruptly canceled it, however, when President Nixon called a Cabinet meeting.

It was during that meeting that Mr. Nixon announced that he would not resign.

After the Cabinet meeting, the Vice President entered his limousine for a second trip to the Capitol, arriving late for a luncheon meeting of Republican Senators.

There behind closed doors,

Mr. Ford briefed the Senators on the Cabinet meeting, including the President's decision not to resign.

"Jerry did it very circum-spectly," Senator Tower reported later. "He expressed no opinion, one way or the other."

By dessert, the conversation turned to impeachment and calls for resignation of the President.

At that point, according to those present, the Vice President rose and quietly asked to be excused. He was applauded as he left the room and strode down the hallway, accompanied by Secret Service agents.

The Vice President's refusal to answer reporters' questions pointed up the seriousness with which he apparently views the President's situation.

For months, Mr. Ford has been holding news conferences across the nation, answering all questions, defending the President but at the same time prodding the White House to release tape recordings of Mr. Nixon's conversations regarding Watergate and allied matters.

Then, within hours of Mr. Nixon's admission yesterday that he had ordered a halt to the investigation just six days after the Watergate break-in and kept this information from his own lawyers and the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Ford issued a statement saying that he would no longer discuss impeachment.

"I intend to respectfully decline to discuss impeachment

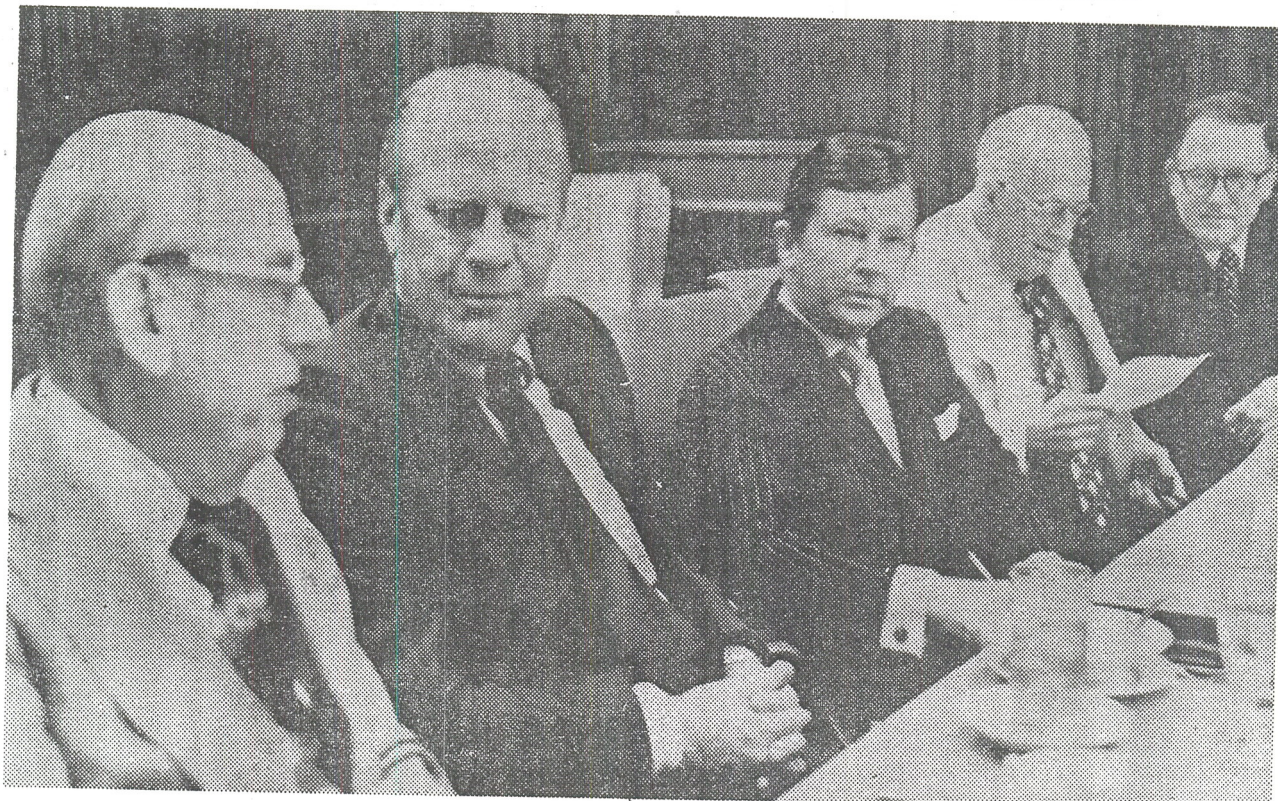
matters in public or in response to questions until the facts are more fully available," he said in his statement.

After leaving the Capitol today for the second time, Mr. Ford spent the rest of the day in his office in the Executive Office Building, next door to the White House. He occupies a suite just above Mr. Nixon's offices.

The Vice President met privately with a group of visiting Japanese legislators, with officers of the National Association of Homebuilders and with members of his staff.

Mr. Ford has scheduled another early breakfast tomorrow with fellow members of the Chowder and Marching Society, an informal group of House Republicans. His aides said that there had been no change in plans for Mr. Ford's scheduled departure Thursday for an 11-day trip to the West Coast and Hawaii.

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Vice President Ford with Republican Senators. From left: Wallace F. Bennett, Mr. Ford, John G. Tower, Norris Cotton and Robert P. Griffin. Mr. Ford left when the

talk turned to the problems of the President. "Jerry's bending over backward to dissociate himself from any comment that might be misinterpreted," Mr. Tower said.