

# Ford Defends Nixon Pardon

Washington

President Ford called yesterday for the creation of a permanent special prosecutor's office to investigate wrongdoing by government officials.

He also said that it is "up to the American people" to decide whether his pardon of President Nixon will be a campaign issue.

At a news conference held beneath a giant elm on the north lawn of the White House, the President said he pardoned Mr. Nixon because it was in the national interest to do so and added, "I would do it again."

Mr. Ford, relaxed and occasionally chuckling despite frequently sharp questions, said that the validity of a charge that he was not intelligent enough to be President, made by the Democrats' vice-presidential nominee, Senator Walter Mondale, will also be decided by the American people.

Mr. Ford told reporters clustered around him that he is "very close right now" to sewing up the Republican presidential nomination. He said that he has 1103 delegates pledged to him of the 1130 necessary to win in Kansas City and that he expects "more good news soon."

The New York Times tally shows Mr. Ford with 1102 delegates compared with 1063 for Ronald Reagan and 94 still listed as uncommitted.

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## State Hearing Tomorrow on Prison Programs

The Assembly Select Committee on Corrections will conduct an all-day public hearing on vocational and educational programs at San Quentin and other major, prisons tomorrow in San Francisco.

Interested members of the public are invited to address the meeting, scheduled for 10 a.m. in the state building at 445 Golden Gate avenue.

Members of the committee toured San Quentin yesterday and took testimony on prison programs from inmates and prison officials as part of the committee's fact-finding mission.

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Of the 94, 21 have told the Times that they are leaning to Mr. Ford and five that they favor Reagan. The rest say they are still uncommitted.

Asked for his assessment of Jimmy Carter, the Democratic presidential nominee, after the Democratic convention, Mr. Ford replied, "I don't think I really had any impression of him."

But he added, when asked if the Carter-Mondale ticket is beatable, "Absolutely."

The President said, "It is a rather typical Democratic ticket when you add it up," and called it "a ticket that can be beaten by the affirmative approach that I intend to take."

The President's proposals for the creation of a special prosecutor's office were contained in a letter he sent yesterday to House Speaker Carl Albert. The proposals were offered as a substitute for Watergate reform legislation pending before Congress and are expected to reach the Senate floor today.

Under Mr. Ford's proposal, the President could appoint a special prosecutor, with the advice of the Senate, to serve a single, three-year term. The prosecutor would be empowered to investigate charges of wrongdoing by the President, vice president, members of Congress and other high-ranking government officials.

Under the legislation that the President is submitting to Congress, the special prosecutor could be removed only for "extraordinary improprieties" and the President would be required to submit a written report explaining such a removal.

Mr. Nixon's firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox touched off a storm of protest that probably contributed to Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Mr. Ford said that he agrees with the general thrust of the Watergate reform legislation now before Congress. But he said that it would create a series of different, independent prosecutors and that his legal advisers questioned the constitutionality of the way the prosecutors would be selected.

On another issue, Mr. Ford said he would not interview potential vice-presidential candidates, as Carter had done.

"I have been thinking about this matter for some time," Mr. Ford said. "I have known all of the individuals who are being considered very well. I have worked with

them, known about them. I have studied carefully their records. Therefore, it won't be a last-minute analysis. It will be based on a good many years of experience and opportunities to know how they performed in public office or otherwise. So, it is not going to be a last-minute decision where we winnow out the individuals in a 48-hour period."

The President said he would not "get into the numbers game" about how many people are on his vice-presidential list.

"We have a fine, fine array of talent in the Republican party and maybe elsewhere, and so we will just keep that open until we make the final choice," Mr. Ford said.

When asked what he meant by elsewhere, the President replied, "Use your imagination."

During the press conference, the President also made these comments:

• Asked about reports that the United States would not lend money to Italy if there were Communists in the Rome government, Mr. Ford said, "This administration would be very disturbed by Communist participation in the government of Italy. For one reason, it would have a very, I think, unfortunate impact on NATO which is, of course, a very vital part of our international defense arrangement. The United States does have apprehension on a broader basis for Communist participation in the Italian government."

• The United States has evidence that "the Libyan government has in many ways done certain things that might have stimulated terrorist activity but I don't think we ought to discuss any evidence that we might have that might prove or disprove that."

• The administration expects to carry out the swine flu immunization program "with or without the help of Congress" and expects the full cooperation of industry.

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