

4-5-75
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New Benefits

More Ford news
on Page 6

Ford in S.F.-- He's Optimistic About Economy

By George Murphy

Addressing himself to the nation's economic problems, President Ford said last night that "the worst may be behind us after too long a period of recession and inflation."

In remarks to the San Francisco Bay Area Council at St. Francis Hotel dinner, the President said he would ask Congress next week to extend benefits to unemployed workers still further.

Already signed into law, he said, are measures providing 13 additional weeks of unemployment benefits for workers in high unemployment states who have exhausted 52 weeks of benefits, and 26 weeks of special unemployment assistance to workers whose jobs had not been previously covered.

Already, the President said, people are beginning to exhaust benefits in both new programs.

Mr. Ford said he will immediately recommend that an additional 13 weeks of benefits be made available to most workers whose present entitlement has run out, extending their payments to a maximum of 65 weeks.

To the crowd of more than 1100 who paid \$50 a person to eat broiled filet mignon in bearnaise sauce with the President in the hotel's grand ball room, Mr. Ford said:

"In the expectation that the economy will show im-

provement before the year is out, I am going to ask that these extended programs have a built-in procedure to reduce or terminate the program when the unemployment rate decreases to a specified level.

"The procedures will concentrate the limited resources in those areas experiencing the greatest unemployment."

The President warned against over-optimism on the economy, while saying it is "starting to show tentative signs that the worst may be behind us.

"This," he emphasized, "does not mean that all our troubles are over. A few

Back Page Col. 4

the other half is expected to provide a free ride.

The President was warmly received by the friendly banquet crowd — the men in tuxedos, the women in formal dresses — receiving a standing ovation at the end of his speech, which was interrupted four times by applause.

The remark that drew the loudest applause came when Mr. Ford warned against proposed moves to "cripple our vital intelligence agencies," which, he said, are vital to the presidency.

Responding to the applause, Mr. Ford smiled, then added:

"I'm glad you feel that way."

The President departed from his prepared text at last night's banquet to express his sorrow at the death of 178 people killed in the crash of a flight bringing Vietnamese orphans to new homes in the United States.

"Let me assure you," he said, "our mission of mercy is going to continue."

He said he would ask the Congress for "a firm American commitment to provide humanitarian aid" to the refugees in South Vietnam and in other areas of the world "stricken by similar tragedies."

The Bay Area Council is a non-profit organization which undertakes and finances long-range studies of environmental, economic,

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transportation and social problems in the nine Bay Area counties.

The President put in a long day yesterday having met with Secretary of States Henry Kissinger until 1 a.m. in Palm Springs.

He lunched yesterday with governors of nine Western states and, according to White House press secretary Ron Nessen, told them he expects to sign, by this summer, a strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union.

Nessen quoted Mr. Ford as telling the governors, "I see no serious deterioration of detente."

He was scheduled to arrive back in Palm Springs at 11:55 p.m.

The President will meet this morning with Kissinger and General Frederick Weyand, whom he sent to Vietnam this week to assess the deteriorating military situation there.

They will confer again this afternoon in Palm Springs.

Nessen was asked on Air Force One yesterday about an apparent conflict between Mr. Ford's statement criticizing South Vietnam's President Thieu's order withdrawing troops and Weyand's statement that it was a "sound strategic action."

Nessen said Weyand was talking about a strategic decision and the President was talking about how the withdrawal was carried out tactically.

Therefore, Nessen said, there was no conflict.

"It was a sound strategic decision, but the President thinks that tactically it was improperly carried out."

However, the President, at a meeting with news executives in San Diego on Thursday, had criticized Thieu's "unilateral" order to withdraw from three military areas as "improper and unnecessary."