

Ford Vigorously Defends Nixon

Atlantic City

In what appeared to be a new, more aggressive defense of President Nixon by the White House, Vice President Gerald Ford lashed out yesterday at what he called "a few extreme partisans" who he said are "bent on stretching out the ordeal of Watergate for their own purposes."

Ford charged that those who seek the President's impeachment really are attacking the President's philosophy and policies such as reduced federal spending and increased "individual independence."

Ford said that the AFL-CIO, Americans for Democratic Action and other "powerful pressure organizations" are engaged in "an all-out attack against the President."

"Their aim is total victory for themselves and the total defeat not only of President Nixon, but of the policies for which he stands," the Vice President declared. "If they can crush the President and his philosophy, they are convinced that they can then dominate the Congress and through it, the Nation."

(The vice president made his remarks before he learned of the latest Watergate disclosure — that tape experts had concluded that a White House tape with an 18½-minute gap had been erased at least five times.

(Asked for a comment, a spokesman for Ford said:

("This is a technical and confusing matter about which I have no personal knowledge. Therefore I have no comment on it.")

The Vice President's harshly worded speech, delivered to 4000 applauding members of the American Farm Bureau Federation, was reminiscent of Spiro T.

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

Agnew's slashing attacks on critics of the Administration.

However, Ford when questioned by newsmen, denied that he was going to assume the former Vice President's role.

In Washington, White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren said at a news briefing that he had "no quarrel" with Ford's speech but asserted that the President had not ordered it. A text of the speech was released by the White House press office yesterday afternoon.

Until now, Mr. Nixon has defended himself against charges of misconduct in office, by issuing denials or by indicating that he is too

preoccupied with the affairs of the Nation to devote his energies to what he has suggested is the relatively minor issue of Watergate.

The speech yesterday by the vice president may signal a Watergate defense tactic of sharp counteroffensive against those waging what Ford described as "a massive propaganda campaign against the president of the United States."

Ford suggested in his speech that Mr. Nixon's assailants are a "relatively small group of political activists" who are trying "to stretch out the ordeal, to cripple the President by dragging out the preliminaries to impeachment for as long as they can, and to use

the affair for maximum political advantage."

Should these activists win, Ford warned, "with the super-welfare states in control of the congress, and the White House neutralized as a balancing force—we can expect an avalanche of fresh government intervention in our economy, massive new government spending, higher taxes and a more rampant inflation."

"The majority of responsible, thinking Americans must not let it happen, and I don't believe they will," Ford added.

In a similar tone in Baltimore yesterday, Senator Barry M. Goldwater charged liberal Democrats with using the Watergate scandal for their own political advantage while creating an impeachment lobby" to remove President Nixon from office.

"This matter has dragged on and on for an insufferable period of time, for what appears to be no better reasons than to gain political advantage for the liberal Democrats or to make unbearable the life of the President," Goldwater said.

The Arizona Republican said he does not think Mr. Nixon will ever resign as president.

"And I don't believe the liberal Democrats have what it takes, either in evidence or guts, to push through an impeachment in the House and a subsequent trial in the Senate," he added.

In a speech to a Maryland GOP fund-raising dinner, Goldwater said Watergate had hurt the Republican party "and hurt us badly."

But he said Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee which is conducting an inquiry into impeachment had turned the investigation into a political football."

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