

# FORD SAYS DATA CAN CLEAR NIXON

## But Vice President Admits He Has Not 'Had Time' to Examine Information

By MARJORIE HUNTER  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22 — Vice President Ford said today that the White House had information that would clear President Nixon of wrongdoing in the Watergate affair or its subsequent cover-up.

The Vice President added that, while Mr. Nixon had volunteered to show him the material, "I haven't had time to read the information."

Mr. Ford also asserted that the President had had nothing to do with the 18½-minute erasure of a key Watergate tape.

"I know that the President was not involved," Mr. Ford said.

The Vice President's strong defense of Mr. Nixon against those calling for his impeachment or resignation came in a 30-minute news conference just down the hall from Mr. Ford's Capitol office.

Mr. Ford was the second prominent Republican to suggest this week that the White House had undisclosed information that would clear the President of wrongdoing in the Watergate scandal.

Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Senate minority leader, said in an interview on the Columbia Broadcasting System's "Face The Nation" television show Sunday that "information available to me" indicated that the President would be exonerated on "specific items."

### Offered Same Material

Mr. Ford said today that President Nixon offered yesterday to show him the same material that Mr. Nixon was said to have made available earlier to Senator Scott.

The Vice President indicated that the material would refute testimony last year by John W. Dean 3d, the President's former counsel, that Mr. Nixon had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up prior to last March 21, the date that the President said he learned of the concealment.

Asked after his news conference if he planned to examine the information, he replied: "There's some question in my mind whether I should see it. It's an open question with me." He did not elaborate on his uncertainty over whether to read the information.

Asked why the White House has not made the material

public, Mr. Ford replied: "It is my understanding that this information has been turned over to [Leon] Jaworski. It would be improper for the White House to release it now."

Mr. Jaworski is the special Watergate prosecutor.

A spokesman for the special prosecutor's office declined to comment today on whether any such information had been received from the White House.

### Cox's Comment

The former special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, who was dismissed from that job by Mr. Nixon last October, said at a news conference today at Amherst College that, during his time in that office, he had no knowledge of any documents that would clear Mr. Nixon along the lines suggested by Mr. Ford and Senator Scott.

While conceding that he had not personally examined the material, Mr. Ford maintained: "That information will exonerate the President. It will totally undercut the testimony of John Dean."

Both Mr. Jaworski and Mr. Cox before him ordered a major investigative effort into testimony provided by Mr. Dean in executive sessions.

One source familiar with the money provided by Mr. Dean in executive sessions.

One source familiar with the handling of the information provided the special prosecutor's office said that "a major part of the investigative effort" was aimed at either corroborating or disproving Mr. Dean's testimony.

### Handled With Care

From the beginning, Mr. Dean has been handled very carefully by the special prosecutor's office because of the explosive nature of his public testimony before the Senate Watergate committee and his own involvement in much of the Watergate cover-up. For that reason, when an agreement was reached to allow him to plead guilty to one count of obstructing justice in return for cooperating with the investigation, it was made clear he could still be charged with perjury.

Sources familiar with the decision say the explicit part of the arrangement was made for two reasons:

¶First, it signaled the public that Mr. Dean's subsequent statements would not be accepted at face value, but would be subject to constant threat of a perjury indictment.

¶Second, part of the argument used by the special prosecutor's office when it went to the White House seeking tapes, documents and other evidence was the need to disprove any of what Mr. Dean had been telling them in executive sessions.

According to the Vice President and Senator Scott, the material they consider would "undercut" Mr. Dean's testimony is now in the hands of the special prosecutor. However, observers familiar with

the investigation have seen no indication that Mr. Jaworski is preparing to seek a perjury indictment against Mr. Dean.

The special prosecutor has declined comment on the matter, but a spokesman for his office said today that the "White House is under no restrictions" from releasing any information it wishes.

"Mr. Jaworski has said that though he is under restrictions from releasing information, the White House is not and that he has made no requirement of the White House not to do so," the spokesman said.