

# Ford Turned Down Offer To See Nixon's Evidence

## He Wants to Avoid Being in Position to Disclose the Material

Columbus, Ohio

Vice President Gerald R. Ford said yesterday he has decided not to examine evidence the White House claims will clear President Nixon of involvement in the Watergate affair or its coverup.

While continuing to express full confidence in the President, Ford apparently has abandoned his earlier strategy of attempting to blame those he called "a few extreme partisans" of trying to run Mr. Nixon out of office.

That was the theme he had sounded just two weeks ago in a speech in Atlantic City to the American Farm Bureau Federation. That speech, written by the White House, was delivered just hours before it was disclosed by experts that a key Watergate tape had been erased and rerecorded at least five times.

Yesterday, as he set out on his first campaign swing since becoming Vice President, Ford carried with him two speeches, one prepared by the White House, the other by his own staff.

In neither prepared speech — one on behalf of a congressional candidate in Johnstown, Pa., the other an acceptance of an award here for "distinction in athletics and in politics" — did Ford mention the President's name.

However, he departed briefly from his prepared text in Johnstown to say that the U.S. is "trusted and respected" on both sides of the iron curtain "under the leadership of President Nixon and (Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger." While obviously determined not to

raise the divisive Watergate issue in addressing crowds, Ford was questioned extensively about both Watergate and impeachment at news conferences here and in Johnstown.

He had disclosed Monday in Washington that Mr. Nixon had offered to let him examine a tape or a document which, he said, the President had told him would clear Mr. Nixon of any involvement in Watergate or its coverup.

Yesterday, under questioning, Ford said: "On reflection, I have decided, at the present time at least, not to personally see" the evidence.

Asked why, he replied: "Because if I do, after I've seen it and I tell you I have, all my good friends in the press corps will be asking me the details. I don't want

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to be in the position of disclosing such evidence."

Asked why he is so certain that the evidence would clear the President, Ford replied: "I am relying on the faith and trust of Senator Hugh Scott who I think is a man of great integrity. I am

relying on the President who also, in my opinion, is a man of faith and high integrity."

Ford said that he also was relying on assurances by Bryce Harlow, a former White House counselor, that the material would clear the President.

The Vice President also spoke highly of the House

Judiciary committee, which is conducting an inquiry into possible impeachment of the President. Asked if he intends to lobby against impeachment among members of the committee, Ford replied: "At the present time I plan no lobbying effort on the impeachment issue."

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