

Ford Hints Release of Tapes

By Jules Witcover
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Vice President Gerald R. Ford reported yesterday that President Nixon had told him about 10 days ago that release of White House tapes and documents demonstrating Mr. Nixon's innocence of any Watergate cover-up "was being actively considered."

Ford said he thought "it's a matter of timing as far as the attorneys when the decision will be made" and he believed that "at the appropriate time his lawyers will make certain recommendations to him to release the documents."

But when asked specifically at a press conference if he understood the material would be released and that it was only a matter of timing the Vice President replied: "I have no specific information."

Later, at the White House, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren appeared to throw some cold water on Ford's statement.



VICE PRESIDENT FORD
... quicker the better"

"That matter has been considered and evaluated within the White House," he said. "There are certain legal implications that must be taken into consideration. It is still under consideration."

Asked whether he meant "serious consideration,"

Warren replied: "I would say consideration."

The Vice President reiterated that he had personally urged the President to release "as quickly as possible" any evidence he had that would exonerate him. "The quicker the better,"

Ford told reporters.

The material in question is said to include summaries of the taped conversation between President Nixon and John Dean III, on March 21, 1972.

Dean testified before the Senate Watergate committee last June that this conversation proved that Mr. Nixon knew of the cover-up well in advance of that date. But Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) has said he has seen the summaries and they prove the President's innocence.

Ford again said that he had declined to examine the

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same material and "I intend to rely on the good word of Mr. Scott" that it supports the President's position.

The Vice President having expressed this conviction, also reiterated his reason for not wanting to examine the evidence. It went like this:

"I've made a very conscious decision that it would be inappropriate for me, in the position I hold to examine that evidence. Let me explain why. Supposing, let's suppose for a minute that I did examine it. And assume—which isn't the case—that I might wish to use that evidence for my own personal benefit to undercut the President. I think it would be very inappropriate with that possibility existing for me to examine the evidence, the tapes in this case, when I might if I were so inclined use it for my own benefit."

Ford had given a similar explanation on CBS News' "Face the Nation" last Sunday. He denied yesterday that his response indicated fear that what he might find would be harmful to the President.

The Vice President said he expected there would be "reasonable cooperation" from the White House with the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry and with Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, provided neither engages in "a broad fishing expedition" not specifically related to the constitutional causes for impeachment—

"treason, bribery or any high crimes or misdemeanors."

Ford described the House's overwhelming 410-to-4 vote Wednesday granting the Judiciary Committee sweeping subpoena power as recognition that the House wants the committee "to proceed rapidly with proper authority."

He said he agreed with the House's refusal to set an April 30 deadline for the investigation, since Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) had promised to act expeditiously.

In another matter, Ford was asked about Mr. Nixon's listing of Ford along with Gov. Ronald Reagan of California and former Govs. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York and John B. Connally of Texas as prospective 1976 Republican presidential candidates, and the President's failure to include Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.)

Ford, who has insisted he has no presidential ambitions but who already leads in national polls of GOP prospects, said he would exclude himself from the list and add Percy "and others."

"I will state again as I have stated so often in the past that I have no intention to be a candidate for any elective office in 1976," he said. "What the President was saying was that there are four Republican names being mentioned who can go out and help the party with fund-raising. I don't think he was saying that I was a candidate . . ."

"I came into office with a fresh situation," Ford said of the polls. "I'm glad to be so well received, but it has not changed my attitude one bit."

Reminded that he had predicted that a Middle East settlement would send Mr. Nixon's own stock in the polls upward, and that in the wake of an apparent settlement that has not happened, Ford said he thought a lifting of the oil embargo might do the trick.

Later, in a speech before a Republican women's forum, the Vice President cited the Middle East settlement among a string of foreign and domestic successes by Mr. Nixon. Without any reference to the Watergate affair that has thrown the

administration onto the defensive, Ford said: "Nothing but pluses appear to be on the scene (in foreign policy). The year of 1973 was a good year by almost any standard."

Looking at the Nixon administration's performance over the last five years, he said, "You wonder how things could have been better." But they could have been with a Republican Congress in any one of the five years, he said, and he challenged pessimistic talk that the 1974 elections would bring heavy GOP losses.