

FORD SAYS NIXON MAY FREE TAPES

Asserts President Assures Him Move Is 'Considered' —'Timing' Called Factor

By MARJORIE HUNTER
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 7—Vice-President Ford said today President Nixon had assured him that a release of key Watergate tape recordings and documents "is being actively considered."

The Vice President said at a news conference that he believed "it's a matter of timing" as to when the material would be made public. However, he said that he had no information "as to the time."

White House aides and Hugh Scott, Republican of Pennsylvania, the Senate minority floor leader, have repeatedly said that the material involved would clear President Nixon of involvement in the Watergate affair and its cover-up.

Mr. Ford said that he and Senator Scott had urged the President to make the information public.

"I have said, the quicker the better," Mr. Ford declared.

Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, also said that consideration was being given to a release of transcripts or summaries of tapes.

No Indication of Time

However, Mr. Warren gave no indication that President Nixon would act soon in making the material public.

The exact nature of the material has never been disclosed. The information has been variously referred to as tape recordings, partial transcripts of tape recordings and written documents.

White House sources have said that the information would clear the President of any wrongdoing and prove false the allegations of John W. Dean 3d, his former White House counsel, that the President had knowledge of the Watergate cover-up earlier than he has said he did.

Just yesterday, President Nixon told a Federal district judge that giving five White House tape recordings to the Senate Watergate committee would be giving them "to the world at large" and would not be "in the national interest."

The President's views were expressed in a letter to Judge Gerhard A. Gessell, who is attempting to decide whether to order the President to comply with a Senate committee subpoena for the five tapes.

Taped Conversations

It is believed that one or more of these taped conversations between the President and Mr. Dean—or perhaps partial transcripts of the tapes—is the material that Senator Scott has said he examined.

Senator Scott disclosed several weeks ago that he had examined the material and was convinced that it would exonerate the President of involvement in important aspects of the Watergate affair or its cover-up. He expressed annoyance that certain White House aides had apparently convinced the President that the information should not be promptly disclosed.

Two days after the announcement by Senator Scott, Vice President Ford said that President Nixon had offered to let him examine the evidence, too, but that he had not decided whether to do so.

A few days later, Mr. Ford announced that he had decided not to examine the material. Instead, he said, he would rely on assurance of the President and Senator Scott that the evidence would clear the President and prove Mr. Dean "to have been in error."

Today, at his new conference, Mr. Ford reiterated his decision not to examine the evidence.

"Let me explain why," he said. "Supposing, let's speculate for a minute, I did examine. Assume, which isn't the case, I might wish to use that evidence for my own personal benefit, to undercut the President."

Asked if he thought that he might find something damaging to the President in the material, the Vice President replied HASTILY, "not at all, because I still have faith in Senator Scott's interpretation of those transcripts, but I don't think it wise in the position I hold to

put myself in that position under the circumstances."

Mr. Ford said that his suggestion that the material be made public "as quickly as possible" was voiced at a meeting with the President about 10 days ago. 297 307 JAN

He said that the President's reaction to that was "that it was being actively considered, but he would make no comment beyond that."

Asked why the President had not released the information, Mr. Ford replied, "I suspect that he's being advised by his

attorneys, relying on their judgment as to when and if they should be released."

Mr. Ford repeated that he had no intention of running for President, though President Nixon included him yesterday as one of four possible contenders for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1968.

The others on Mr. Nixon's list were Gov. Ronald Regan of A. Rockefeller of New York and John B. Connally, former governor of Texas who was Secretary of the Treasury.