

If Watergate Had Happened to Ford

New York

Vice President Gerald R. Ford said yesterday he would have pushed the Watergate investigation harder if he had been in the White House when the scandals first broke.

In a question-and-answer session at the annual meeting of The Associated Press, Ford also called on President Nixon to "do anything reasonable" to clear up the Watergate controversy, including maximum cooperation with the House Judiciary

Committee's impeachment probe.

Ford said he hoped Mr. Nixon would, within the next 72 hours, turn over the "relevant" material asked by the committee from the White House.

A subpoena issued by the committee seeking tapes and documents from the White House falls due Thursday morning.

In response to a question about what he would have

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done if he had been president at the time Watergate broke, Ford said Mr. Nixon obviously was not kept properly informed by his subordinates and that he—Ford—would have demanded better information.

"Whether there should have been a more vigorous prosecution of all the details, that's a matter of judgment," Ford said of the White House investigation. "In my judgment, I would have given a sort of nudge to my employees as hard as I possibly could.

"Some of the people who should have known obviously did not give him the whole story."

Ford said neither he nor Mr. Nixon knew anything about the burglary and bugging of Democratic party headquarters in Washington's Watergate complex during the 1972 presidential election campaign but had discussed the ramifications of the case frequently.

"I have indicated to him on a number of occasions that I thought he should do anything reasonable in order to clear up the problems that have developed subsequent to Watergate itself," Ford said.

"I have consistently said the sooner any and all relevant evidence was made available, the better the Congress could consider, and the American people evaluate, whether or not he was involved prior to, at the time of, or subsequent" to the Watergate break-in, Ford said.

"I hope and trust that some time in the next 48 or 72 hours, the White House will cooperate to the maximum in making available to the House Committee on the Judiciary the relevant material that the committee has requested," Ford said.

The committee's subpoena seeks tapes and documents covering 42 White House conversations in connection with its impeachment probe. The White House had indicated it will turn over what it considers "relevant."

While Ford urged maximum cooperation, he retained the White House language stressing "relevant" material. Committee chairman Peter Rodino, (Dem.-N.J.) has said anything short of full compliance with the subpoena might be taken as a ground for impeachment.

"In my judgment, the President is innocent of charges based on the definition of impeachment as it is written in the Constitution," Ford said.

The Vice President said he based this belief on conversations with Senate minority leader Hugh Scott, (Rep.-Pa.) and others who have heard White House tapes, and on news reports.

Ford reiterated, however, that he has "scrupulously avoided" the opportunity offered by Mr. Nixon to listen to the tapes or read transcripts of them, for fear of compromising the disinterest of the man who would succeed Mr. Nixon if the President leaves office.

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