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**Friends Say Ford Denies
He Undercuts President**

By MARJORIE HUNTER
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 23—Vice President Ford has confided to acquaintances in recent weeks that he is perplexed by what he senses to be the feeling of some White House aides that he is attempting to undercut President Nixon.

The Vice President has concluded, according to those sources, that certain members of Mr. Nixon's staff don't understand the close relationship, dating back more than a quarter of a century, that Mr. Ford has had and continues to have with the President.

The apparent schism between certain White House aides and Mr. Ford is not unique in American politics. Paesidential aides, at least those in recent Administrations, have always expressed concern over any show of independence by a Vice President.

As one Vice-Presidential aide once put it:

"There is a difference in the concept of what a Vice President should be. The White House staff feels he should be a subordinate of the President, an errand boy waiting to do the President's bidding. They feel that their function is to see to it that the President is No. 1 at all times."

Members of Mr. Nixon's staff, at least some at high levels, are known to subscribe to this view of a Vice President's role. Some are willing to grant the Vice President at least some measure of independence.

But the general feeling of many of President Nixon's aides was perhaps best enun-

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ated recently by William Safire, a former special assistant to Mr. Nixon and now a columnist for The New York Times.

Mr. Ford, Mr. Safire wrote, "betrays a lack of understanding of the uniqueness of his role: He is the first Vice President in American history whose own actions could help make him President."

Several recent incidents have reinforced the belief of certain White House aides that Mr. Ford is not as loyal to Mr. Nixon as he has professed to be.

Three weeks ago, in a speech

that was not cleared with the White House, Mr. Ford denounced the 1972 Nixon campaign organization as "an arrogant, elite guard of political adolescents."

Magazine Article Cited

A week later, The New Republic magazine published an article, based largely on an interview with Mr. Ford, describing the Vice President's views on how he would reshuffle the Cabinet and White House if he became President.

Some White House aides were particularly incensed by the part of the article that described Mr. Ford's uneasiness over long hours spent in the President's company.

"Recent reports that he doesn't get as much time with the President as he needs and would like to have genuinely puzzle Ford," the article stated.

"The hours that he's had to spend with the President, mostly listening to Mr. Nixon talk about this and that, have on a few occasions driven the Vice President close to distraction. He's brought himself recently to break off their conversations, pleading that he's got to go some place or do something important right away."

In the days that followed publication of the article, Mr. Ford appeared obviously chagrined over the furor he had created by granting the interview. And he expressed particular distress over the comment about Presidential conversation driving him close to distraction.

What he really meant, he said later, was that he felt he was taking up too much of the President's time, that he was reluctant to break off conversations with Mr. Nixon and yet did not like to overstay his welcome and be told by the President to leave.

2½-Hour Conversation

One such Nixon-Ford conversation about a month ago is understood to have lasted for two and one-half hours, terminating only as the dinner hour approached. Others, it is understood, have taken place at the end of Cabinet meetings or other meetings at the White House.

The President's sudden desire for long conversations with friends such as Mr. Ford has intrigued many political observers, for Mr. Nixon, during his years in Congress, his years as Vice President and his early

years as President was never one for small talk.

Mr. Ford's reluctance to overstay his welcome in the Oval Office, as he put it, is said by close associates to stem at least in part from his own distaste for small talk during business hours, and his incredibly heavy travel schedule, which leaves him little free time in Washington.

When President Nixon first appointed him as Vice President last fall, Mr. Ford viewed his role primarily as that of building better relations between the White House and Congress.

In recent months, however, his focus has shifted dramatic-

ally, and he now spends virtually all his waking hours traveling all over the country on behalf of Republican candidates, seeking to avert party setbacks following what he calls "the tragedy of Watergate."

In one week alone, he received 900 invitations to speak at various functions, political and nonpolitical. It is obvious that he has become the most sought-after Republican figure in the nation, and this, too, has upset some White House aides who feel that the Vice President is overshadowing the President.

Mr. Ford is said to be deeply concerned over the apparent feelings of some White House aides that he is intentionally trying to overshadow Mr. Nixon. He has told close friends that he has no desire to rupture his still close relationship with the President,

but he feels he is obliged to do all he can to keep the party from being swept away in a Democratic landslide this fall.

He is said to feel that President Nixon, unlike some of his White House aides, fully understands and approves of what he is doing and has never reprimanded him for any actions.

Mr. Ford observed a few weeks ago that Mr. Nixon did not tell him of any objections after the Vice President's attack on the Nixon campaign organization. Mr. Ford has also said that the President's only expressed concern over the Vice President's heavy travel schedule has been to ask him, "Do you think you're doing too much for the good of your health?"

Despite his attack on the Nixon campaign organization and his frequent assertion in

speeches that "I am my own man," Mr. Ford is said to feel that he has never said anything against Mr. Nixon, either publicly or privately.

There have been some indications in the last week that at least token efforts are under way to heal the apparent schism between some White House aides and the Vice President.

Shortly after the appearances of the New Republic article in which Mr. Ford singled out Ronald L. Ziegler as one Nixon aide he would not keep if he became President, Mr. Ziegler asked Mr. Ford for an autographed picture.

And has Mr. Ford asked for an autographed picture of Mr. Ziegler?

"No," the Vice President replied, "about the only person I've asked for a picture is the President himself."