

Ford's Strong Talk on Scandal

Chicago

Vice President Gerald R. Ford told a university audience yesterday that numerous disclosures of "corruption, malfeasance and wrongdoing" at the highest levels of the federal government were "hammer blows to the confidence the American people have placed in their government."

In what was construed by some as the vice president's harshest criticism yet of the Nixon administration, Ford said "a grave situation" existed in the government caused by "a continuous series of revelations and reports of corruption, malfeasance and wrongdoing in the federal government, not the least of which is the sorry mess which carries the label of Watergate."

"We have seen charge and counter-charge, indictments, confessions, convictions involving some of the highest officials," Ford told an early morning gathering at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Ill.

The plethora of scandalous disclosures, he said, has "created a diminished confidence in our public officials, basic distrust of their motives."

Later, at a press conference in Chicago, the vice

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president took a more mollifying tone toward the Nixon administration, continuing what some observers who have traveled with him extensively call his "tight rope act" in which he will strongly criticize the administration in one place only to temper his remarks in another.

After delivering a speech to a convention of computer experts here on the need for preserving individual privacy, the vice president headed for the University of Chicago's Center for Continuing Education where he met with the press.

In response to a question,

he said that he had read the transcripts of Mr. Nixon's tapes in detail and that "I believe the overwhelming weight of the evidence" of the transcripts as well as information he said he had from other unspecified sources "convinces me the President is not guilty of an impeachable offense."

"In my opinion, the President, I hope, will survive because I think he's innocent," Ford said.

The vice president arrived in Chicago on a day when the staunchly Republican Chicago Tribune editorially called for Mr. Nixon's resignation or impeachment because of a reading of the transcripts showed "the private man and we are appalled."

Asked whether the newspaper's position, as well as recent strong criticism from prominent Republicans meant that it was time for the President "to leave" office, Ford said: "I can't pass judgment."

He added: "I believe the constitutional process ought to continue in the Congress. I do not believe the President should resign."

In his speech at Eastern Illinois University, Ford alluded to the excisions in the White House tape transcripts saying: "While it may be easy to delete characterization from the printed page, we cannot delete characterization from people's minds with a wave of the hand."

He was asked to amplify on these and other earlier comments at the press conference.

"What I was saying was you can't take words in the transcript and get the total atmosphere," he said. "You have to be in the room. You have to get the atmosphere."

Referring to some of the language in the transcripts, he said he knew from "personal experience" that "in many instances there have been some pretty frank discussions in the Oval Office," during other administrations.

Asked whether a fuller understanding of "the atmos-

phere" might emerge from the President's giving the House Judiciary Committee the actual tape recordings, Ford replied that the judiciary committee as well as Senator Sam Ervin's committee "have had 19 of these tapes for several months. They have a great storehouse of information."

It was his understanding, the vice president continued, that "the other tapes have many areas that don't have any relevancy at all," to the impeachment inquiry.

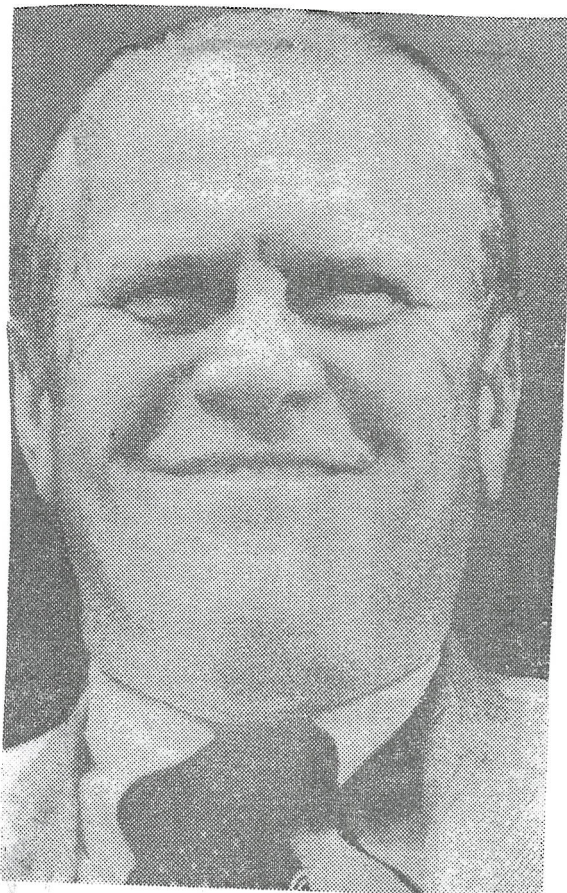
Has the President been "enfeebled" by Watergate and by the strong negative reaction of leading Republicans to the transcript's contents, he was asked.

"I haven't seen any evidence that the President has lost any of his clout in his handling of foreign affairs," Ford said. "At home I don't see any erosion of his capability to work in the execution of the laws of the country."

Paul Miltich, Ford's press aide on the Illinois trip, was asked if the vice president's first speech of the day at Eastern Illinois University had been discussed, either before or after its delivery, with the White House.

"No, he has not discussed it with anybody at the White House," Miltich replied.

New York Times



AP Wirephoto

VICE PRESIDENT FORD IN CHICAGO
He grinned at one of his introductions