

'GRAVE SITUATION' DEPICTED BY FORD

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He Says Scandals Diminish
Confidence in Officials—

Later Tempers His Tone

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By United Press International

CHICAGO, May 9 — Vice President Ford told a university audience today 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."

He said that while he continued to believe that President Nixon was not guilty of an impeachable offense, "a grave situation" existed in the Government.

That situation, he said, was 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."

Mr. Ford's remarks were construed by many of those who have observed him closely

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Ford, in Talk in Illinois, Depicts 'Grave Situation' in Government

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as his harshest criticism yet of the Administration.

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

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

Later, at a news conference in Chicago, the Vice President took a more mollifying tone toward the Nixon Administration, continuing what some who have traveled with him extensively call his "tight-rope act." By this they mean that he strongly criticizes 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, Mr. Ford 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 President Nixon's tapes in detail. "I believe the overwhelming weight of the evidence" of the transcripts, as well as information from other unspecified sources, "convinces me the President is not guilty of an impeachable offense," he said.

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

The Vice President arrived in Chicago on a day when an editorial in the staunchly Republican Chicago Tribune called for Mr. Nixon's resignation or impeachment because a reading of the transcripts, it said, showed "the private man, and we are appalled."

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

"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, Mr. Ford referred 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 news 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" in other administrations.

Asked whether a fuller "universe" might emerge from the President's giving the House Judiciary Committee the tape that that committee and Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr.'s committee "have had 19 of these tapes for several months."

"They have a great storehouse of information," he said.

Says Nixon Keeps 'Clout'

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 transcripts' 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," Mr. 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, Mr. 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 with the White House.

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