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Ford Sticks to Safe Themes in Southern Swing

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Ford follows Olympia Brass Band to the tune of "When the Saints Go Marching In" on arrival for dedication of a New Orleans terminal.

Associated Press

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PENSACOLA, Fla., May 13—Vice President Ford stuck to safe and familiar themes in a political swing through the South today with no mention of Watergate or the beleaguered President.

National defense, revenue sharing, pride in country—those were the notes Ford

chose to strike in remarks in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Pensacola before friendly if not enthusiastic audiences.

Ironically, he traveled to all three places at the urging of Democrats, not fellow Republicans. So today it was Ford the politician acquiring political capital — not Ford the Vice President

shoring up his President and his Republican Party.

Apparently to avoid being forced to answer questions on Watergate and possible impeachment of President Nixon, Ford shunned any press conferences during a long day of traveling.

Reporters who had been traveling with Ford since last fall said the Vice President has changed his rela-

tionship with the press within the last few days from an easy, answer-any-question approach to a more structured one.

Ford was quoted last week about the possibility that the President's Watergate troubles might weaken his hand in dealing with the Russians—publicity that Ford did not welcome. Ford protested afterward to some

newsmen that he considered remarks along those lines to be off the record.

From now on, if today proves typical, Ford will stick to safe subjects and try to avoid Watergate and related problems if possible.

The Vice President, who specialized in military affairs while a member of the

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House Armed Services Committee, feels comfortable speaking about those matters and did so repeatedly today.

"Strength brings peace, and military strength continues peace," Ford told his audience in New Orleans. "We must maintain that military capability so that others respect us."

The occasion was the dedication of a new terminal building at the Port of New Orleans in the district of Committee Chairman F. Edward Hebert (D-La.). Hebert accompanied Ford from Washington and sat on the platform with an approving look as Ford spoke about the need for military strength.

At Baton Rouge he addressed a joint session of the Louisiana state legislature and the need for "a strong national defense to deter aggression."

He also pleaded with the lawmakers to look at "what is right in America.

"I do not come before you today as the Vice President of a nation suffering from the plagues of slavery, pestilence, famine, revolution, or war," he continued.

"That we have seen problems in our time is without question. But more importantly it is my belief that

when the historians of the ebb and flow of power in America write about these times from a quieter future vantage point, they will record that some great deeds have been done and some great goals have been accomplished."

Ford said that power is flowing back from the federal government to the states, where it belongs.

He also hailed progress in bringing peace to the Midwest "through the genius of our Secretary of State," but he did not mention Mr. Nixon in that connection.

And without mentioning Watergate, Ford said, "Our institutions have not lost their ability to move forward in solving our nation's problems. Our institutions are sound; they are strong; and our course is steady and our cause is just."

At Pensacola, Ford toured the Naval Air Training Center and was briefed there on world naval strategy before attending a Chamber of Commerce dinner.

Louisiana's Democratic Gov. Edwin W. Edwards hosted the Vice President when he addressed the Democratic-dominated state legislature at Baton Rouge. U.S. Rep. Robert L. F. Sikes, a Democrat whose district includes the Pensacola Navy base, persuaded Ford to attend the Chamber of Commerce dinner.