

Ford Talks About His Own Ideas

By Marjorie Hunter
New York Times

Washington

Vice President Gerald Ford is fully aware that he is on the threshold of the presidency but is uncertain when he will cross it.

That is the impression that emerged in an exclusive interview with Ford yesterday, as rumors of President Nixon's possible resignation swept the capital.

Ford said he feels fully prepared to assume the office of the President but that he and his staff have not made "transition plans."

He termed it "premature" to discuss whether he would choose former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller as his vice president — a suggestion made Tuesday by one of Ford's closest friends and advisers, Melvin R. Laird, former secretary of defense in the Nixon cabinet.

Ford also declined to say whether the matter

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in recent months — and with Kissinger's deputy, Major General Brent Scowcroft.

In addition, he said, he has had three or four breakfast conferences with Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger and meets weekly with William E. Timmons, head of the White House legislative liaison team.

"I get a daily briefing from the CIA, the same briefing that the President has gotten or gets," he added.

Ford was also briefed extensively by Admiral Noel Gayler, commander in chief, United States Armed Forces, Pacific, during a visit to Pearl Harbor several

months ago. He was given a confidential briefing on nuclear capabilities during a visit last month at Los Alamos, N.M.

He said he also had received a "detailed briefing" during a visit to Strategic Air Command headquarters and was given two "in-depth briefings" by Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I think I know as much, if not more, about the government than any vice president," he said.

Does he then feel prepared to assume the presidency?

"I think I'm well prepared for any contingency," he replied.

The vice president denied reports that he had ordered the staff to prepare plans or policies for presidential transition.

"I have told nobody on my staff, from Bob Hartman (his chief of staff) on down to make any contingency plans," he said.

Asked if he felt the time had come that he should do so, the vice president replied: "I don't think the time has come for me to discuss it."

Asked whom he considered his closest advisers, aside from those now on his staff, Ford named Laird; John W. Byrnes, a former House colleague who was once ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee; Philip W. Buchan of Grand Rapids, Mich., his for-

mer law partner and a moderate Republican; Bryce Harlow, a former aide to both Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon; and William G. Whyte, assistant vice president of U.S. Steel Corp.

"Now if you start talking about people in Congress," he said, "I don't want to differentiate at this point. They're all my friends. And, hopefully, will be my advisers."

Describing his own dream for America, the vice president said that he sees a nation of "211 million wonderful people" whose belief in this country should be channeled into providing both material things and "all of the other blessings" they seek.

"I think there's a great reservoir of pent up feeling that people think we can have more jobs and better jobs and better education," he said. "There's really a deep conviction that we can meet all these challenges and I think if we give some direction and some inspiration, this is the kind of vision I feel is right for America."

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of orderly presidential transition had been discussed during an hour-long conference he had early yesterday morning with Alexander M. Haig Jr., Mr. Nixon's chief of staff.

"I'm not talking about any matters of that kind," Ford said quietly.

Yet, he spoke freely of his own dreams of what America could become and of the men he considers his closest advisers — including some who presumably might form the nucleus of his own administration.

The vice president was surprisingly calm as he relaxed in a satin-upholstered chair in his spacious Capitol office, just off the Senate floor.

Outside his door, newsmen and tourists thronged the ornate lobby, and, when he left his office, pursued him down the Capitol hallways.

Ford said that he has not had any private conversations with Mr. Nixon in recent days.

"No, and I think understandably," Ford said. "But

I have been kept abreast. I've had, as you know, several meetings with Al (Haig)."

Asked what he considered the President's emotional state to be right now, the vice president replied: "I thought he looked surprisingly well yesterday, considering all the trauma he had gone through."

Asked if he felt that the President had lied to him, as some members of Congress have said they do, Ford paused for a few seconds, then replied: "I don't think I ought to answer that."

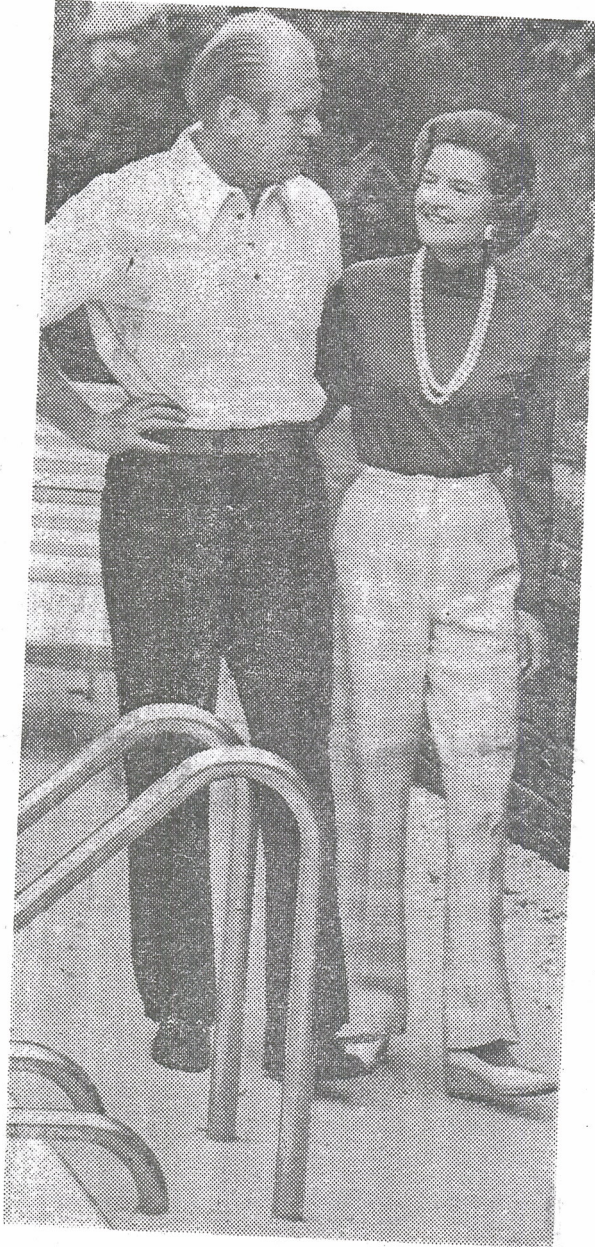
Does Ford feel that he has adequately prepared himself to become President?

"No question about that," Ford replied self-assuredly. "I think I've worked real hard. Aside from all the speeches, I've worked very hard."

He said he had visited every executive department of the federal government to confer with the Cabinet secretaries and their top aides.

He said he had regular meetings with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger — whom he has lavishly praised at every opportunity

He's Ready



UPI Telephoto

Gerald Ford and his wife Betty took a stroll by their pool yesterday