

Ford Backs Away From Mass Pardon Statement

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Watergate Requests Will Be Handled on An Individual Basis

Washington

President Ford yesterday drew back from his spokesman's statement Tuesday that pardons were "under study" for all Watergate figures and said that any requests for pardon will be considered on an individual basis.

After a stormy protest against his pardon Sunday of former President Nixon and his spokesman's suggestion Tuesday that other Nixon administration Watergate figures might be pardoned, Mr. Ford issued a formal statement substantially altering the comment made in his name Tuesday.

The President said, in effect, that those charged or convicted of Watergate crimes would be treated the same as any other individual if they make requests for pardon.

The statement yesterday said:

The announcement yesterday by Mr. (acting press secretary John W.) Hushen concerning study of the entire matter of presidential clemency and pardons was prompted by inquiries to the White House press office concerning Mrs. John Dean's reported statement in reference to pardoning of her husband and similar public statements on behalf of others.

"Such a study is, of course, made for any request concerning pardon of an individual.

"However, no inference should be drawn as to the outcome of such study in any case. Nor is my pardon of the former President, un-

der the unique circumstances stated by me in granting it, related to any other case which is or may be under study."

Senate majority leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania read the President's statement to reporters after a nearly two-hour meeting Mr. Ford held with GOP congressional leaders.

Scott and House minority leader John J. Rhodes of Arizona both said there is "no study now" of pardon requests for Watergate defendants.

When the President receives a request for action, "he will consider it most carefully," Scott said. "Applications for pardon have not reached the President. When they do, that is when a study will be necessary."

Rhodes said that the intent of the Hushen statement Tuesday was to say that if the President received appli-

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cations for pardon from any Watergate figures the requests "will not be thrown into the wastebasket" but will receive serious attention.

Reporters sought without success to determine why the President's clarifying statement on Watergate fig-

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ures, issued early yesterday, had not been put out soon after the Hushen statement was made shortly after noon Tuesday. 10 SEP

Hushen was repeatedly questioned about his comment at the time. He said that the President has authorized it. Reporters asked if he recognized the effect it would have on public and congressional opinion, and he said that had been taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, despite repeated inquiries to the press office Tuesday afternoon for clarification, none was forthcoming. Meanwhile, denunciations from members of Congress deluged the White House.

Assistant Senate Minority Leader Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, who attended yesterday's congressional leadership meeting at the White House, said it was his understanding that the President instructed Hushen to make the original statement because he did not want to indicate the issue of pardons for others was being rejected out of hand.

Scott said that Mr. Ford alone made his decision to pardon the former President but informed Scott of it prior to Sunday's announcement. Scott said he told the President it would be controversial but that if it were to be done it should be done quickly.

"My mail is heavily critical," the Pennsylvania Senator said, but he added: "I believe that if the President had delayed a decision the country would have divided into two camps and the effect would have been highly divisive."

Scott and Rhodes said they supported Mr. Ford's decision on the former President, but neither suggested pardons for those charged or convicted of Watergate crimes.

Rhodes said he supported the presidential decision because "continuing the Watergate matter is not in the best interest of the country." He said he doubted that Mr. Nixon could get a fair trial anywhere in the U.S. because of advance publicity.

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