

SFChronicle SEP 14 1974

Kennedy Is Critical Of Pardon

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Sept. 13—Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) said today President Ford's opening a 2-day political swing through California, said today President Ford's pardon of former President Nixon "has led many Americans to believe it was a culmination of the Watergate cover-up."

But Kennedy, asked at a press conference here whether he was suggesting there had been a deal on the pardon between Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon said he had never made such a suggestion and added, "I have no basis of evidence to believe so."

Reports that the President had been considering pardons for other individuals involved in Watergate raised questions in people's minds, Kennedy said, until Mr. Ford disavowed those reports.

Kennedy said he did not know whether the reporters were "a trial balloon" or "the President was now backtracking," but he called any suggestion of blanket pardons "ill-conceived and poorly timed."

Kennedy, in his first major political outing since President Ford took office, provided a preview of the kind of campaign he might run against Mr. Ford if he is a candidate in 1976.

Kennedy not only criticized the Nixon pardon but urged Mr. Ford to move expeditiously to cope with the nation's major domestic problem, inflation. He said he stood ready to work with the President to deal with economic ills but that the country could not wait until after the election or longer to deal with the problem.

Kennedy visited major elements in his constituency—a labor meeting, a liberal foreign policy forum, a predominantly black high school and a fund-raiser of Democratic party regulars.

As in the past, he declined to say whether he would be a

candidate in 1976, but he was preserving and strengthening his options to run with this trip.

In a press conference here, Kennedy appeared to be advancing the date by which he will make known whether he will seek the presidency in 1976.

"I'd expect to make some statement at the end of this year or early in the next," Kennedy said.

Some Democrats have been suggesting that Kennedy make known his intentions early so that other Democratic hopefuls will have time to build their own candidacies if he decides not to run. Most party leaders are saying that if Kennedy seeks the nomination he is likely to win it easily, though there is considerable sentiment among party leaders that he should not run.

Responsibility to the Kennedy family and children is considered perhaps the prime factor in his decision to run. Kennedy's wife, Joan, attended one of his speeches here today, in which some regarded as a demonstration of her support for testing of his political strength.

"I was in Boston last week trying to ask people of my city to obey a court order," said Kennedy, who was booed and refused a chance to speak in Boston's school busing controversy.

"I had an extremely difficult time in expecting those people to respond to the question of why should we obey the law when it appears there's a different standard of justice for the President. I found I couldn't answer that question."

Kennedy, speaking here to the convention of the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades, was applauded when he criticized the Nixon pardon.

Recalling that Mr. Ford, in his nomination hearings for appointment as Vice President, had said the country would not stand for the pardon of a President by a man named as his successor, Kennedy said:

"I don't think the country will stand for it and I don't think that the country should have to stand for it. It was the wrong time, the wrong place and the wrong person to receive a pre-indictment, pre-conviction pardon."

Kennedy said that Mr. Ford's assumption of the presidency had given rise to renewed hopes after Watergate, but he added that in light of the pardon "it is more important than ever to assure the policies of the new President are forged in the anvil of public interest."