

Ford Disclaims Diverting Funds To His Own Use

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Says Prosecutor Will
Find No Wrongdoing

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—President Ford said today that he had never diverted any campaign funds for personal use and expressed confidence that the current investigation by the Watergate special prosecutor would show him to be "free of any allegations."

Mr. Ford did concede today that he "might" have discussed Government business with corporate officials while their guest on golfing excursions but said that there had been no impropriety.

Prosecution Doubted

The Watergate special prosecutor is winding up his inquiry into Mr. Ford's campaign finances, and there are growing indications that no criminal prosecution is contemplated, according to officials in Michigan and Government sources in Washington. [Page A18.]

[Campaigning in Boston, Jimmy Carter said he accepted Mr. Ford's declaration of innocence, adding that as far as he was concerned, the President's statement ended any question of impropriety in campaign finances and golf trips, The Associated Press reported.]

[Mr. Carter, the President's Democratic opponent, said Wednesday that Mr. Ford should discuss the investigation publicly.]

Mr. Ford, answering the questions of reporters who were summoned on short

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notice into the Oval Office of the White House this morning, said he was "bothered a bit" by reports of an investigation by the Watergate prosecutor into the finances of Republican campaign committees in Kent County, Mich., in his home Congressional district.

He said that he did not question the integrity of the prosecutor, Charles F. Ruff, but asked that the investigation be completed quickly.

"There is a saying in the law that 'justice delayed is justice denied,'" Mr. Ford said, adding, "I am certain that the people responsible for the investigation will live up to the high standards required in the Canon of Ethics for the legal profession, which does require that in any such investigations that they be full, complete and concluded as readily as possible."

The President said that he had no way of knowing what would be the political impact of the reports that he might be an object of the prosecutor's investigation.

"It is more important to me personally that it be cleared up," he said, "because I am very proud of my record of personal

integrity and I think that is more important than any impact it might have on the election."

He stressed that no one on his staff had any authority to get in touch with either the special prosecutor or the Department of Justice "to hinder or impede whatever investigations are going on."

When asked why he did not try to find out what the investigation was about, if only out of simple curiosity, the President replied:

"We are trying to be so circumspect, so that we are not under any circumstances accused of any improprieties, that I have told members of my staff that under no circumstances should they make contact with either the special prosecutor or the Department of Justice."

Mr. Ford leaned against the edge of his massive desk as he answered questions from a group of reporters who gathered about him in a tight semicircle. His demeanor was serious and even grim, but when a reporter said that he looked worried Mr. Ford denied that he was.

He also denied that he had called the news conference because of charges by the Carter campaign that he had been "ducking" reporters' questions about the

investigation." This was his first news conference since Sept. 8.

The issue of the investigation arose last week when it was disclosed that the special prosecutor had subpoenaed the financial records of the Kent County Republican Committee, including records of Mr. Ford's Congressional campaigns. The prosecutor also subpoenaed the records of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, a union that was the biggest contributor to Mr. Ford's campaign for his House seat in 1972.

The prosecutor's office has never officially commented on the matter, and no one has produced any direct evidence that President Ford is involved in the investigation.

Today Mr. Ford was asked to say flatly whether or not any campaign money had ever been diverted to his personal use.

He replied: "Well, I don't know whether that is an allegation that is being investigated by the special prosecutor's office, but I can say that there was never money given to me by the Kent County Republican Committee." Then, after explaining that the committee customarily spent money on such things as campaign advertisements for him and other Republican candidates, he added, "No money ever went to me personally."

Pressed for a more categorical reply, the President said that he had never diverted "any campaign funds for personal use."

The subject of Mr. Ford's golf outings with corporation lobbyists is unrelated to the investigation by the Watergate prosecutor. It arose when William G. Whyte, a vice president of the United States Steel Corporation who is an old friend of Mr. Ford's, disclosed that his company had paid the bills for several golfing weekends Mr. Ford spent at a golf club in New Jersey as well as a stay at the company's lodge outside Disney World in Florida, while Mr. Ford was still a member of Congress.

The White House subsequently acknowledged that Mr. Ford had been the guest of a number of other corporations for golfing excursions. He had stopped accepting such favors after he became Vice President in late 1973, the White House said.

Asked about these outings today, Mr. Ford replied that the House of Representatives had passed a resolution prohibiting its members from accepting gifts of any substance. "I do not feel that there was any impropriety on my part or any violation of that regulation," he said.

"I am an avid golfer," the President said by way of explanation. "Most of you know it. I enjoy the company of people while I am playing golf. Every person that has been involved in these allegations I have reciprocated with as far as they coming either to my golf club or coming to our home. Whatever the circumstances of our getting together, it has been in a proper way and in no way a violation, in my judgment, of any rule or ethical standard."

"These are close personal friends and have been for many years, and I have never accepted—or I don't believe they have tendered—any such things on the basis of seeking any special privilege or anything that was improper."



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President Ford discusses a variety of subjects at a news conference held in the Oval Office of the White House