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Ford Deplores Fiscal Policy

By Wilford Kale

Times-Dispatch State Staff
WILLIAMSBURG — Gerald Ford, at the college of William and Mary yesterday to lecture to students, charged that the economic policies of the Carter administration "have been a disaster. They've blown it."

Carter and his staff have "re-ignited inflation by irresponsible fiscal policies," Ford added, noting that the prime interest rate is at a record high, inflation is running about 13 percent and unemployment is growing.

For the most part, however, Ford sounded more like an elder statesman than a Republican Party presidential candidate. At a press conference, he strongly restated his position:

"I am not a candidate for any political office. I have no plans to be a candidate for any political office."

As a politician, he said he has learned "never say never," but "the scenario is so remote that I would not get involved in the 1980 campaign." The only scenario he even discussed involved the Republican National Convention.

What if the convention were deadlocked? Would he accept a draft?

"I've never ducked any responsibility in politics or otherwise," he responded. "I'd feel an obligation."

Ford acknowledged that there has been great pressure recently on him to become a candidate. Those urging him to run include "Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. There have been phone calls, letters, contact," he said.

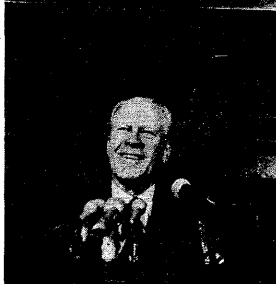
"What would change my mind? I really haven't written the scenario. It's so remote."

Earlier this week, his wife, Betty, told reporters that he was not running. Would she oppose another White House bid?

"Betty is in the best of health, the best of our 31 years of marriage," Ford said. "She traditionally has supported whatever decision I made."

He noted, however, that she

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Staff Photo by Amir Pishdad

Former President Ford Answers Questions
Conference Was Held in Great Hall of Wren Building

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concur with his decision not to run.

Ford flew to Virginia Tuesday night from his Palm Springs, Calif., home. He was met at William and Mary yesterday morning by reporters, a few students, President Thomas A. Graves Jr. and William B. Sprong Jr., dean of the Marshall-Wythe School of Law.

He exchanged warm greetings with Speng, who served a term in the Senate while Ford was in the House of Representatives. "Bill, how are you?" Ford said. "It's nice being here."

His itinerary included a 20-minute news conference and three classroom lectures, two at the law school and one in the government department.

The students warmly received Ford and a large number turned out in the evening to hear a more formal address at William and Mary Hall, where he again talked about the plight of the economy.

Earlier, he told students that the Federal Reserve Board had little choice but to boost its prime interest rate a full point. "All of that could have been avoided," he said, if the Carter administration "had followed the economic policies we followed."

"Only Answer"

He said that during his term, the inflation rate was slowed to 4.8 percent and the prime interest rate was brought to 6.25 percent. "They re-ignited inflation, and the only answer they have is to slam on the brakes," he added.

"When I became president we had serious economic problems. I'm proud of our economic progress" during his term, Ford said.

He also was highly critical of Carter's handling of the recent Cuban affair involving the brigade of Soviet troops on the island, saying Carter's televised speech last week "was not alternative enough."

At the outset Carter and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance split the troops in Cuba "were unacceptable. They both used that term," Ford said, "and I think they were right." But Ford said that Carter's speech implied that the troops "were acceptable . . . that inconsistency will help erode the U.S. image," he added.

Ford said he was disappointed in the speech, and Carter's actions establishing a command post at Key West, Fla., and increasing troop strength temporarily at Guantanamo Bay "was just window dressing."

The former president denied a charge by Prime Minister Fidel Castro that Ford knew about the troops.

No Indication

"At no time during my presidency did the intelligence community send to the White House or to Henry Kissinger any indication there were Soviet combat troops there. Carter's mishandling of the problem, Ford said, resulted in the "first time an American president has been stonewalled by the Soviet Union and has not responded . . . and it is the first time the United States has accepted hostile foreign troops in the Western Hemisphere."

He criticized the "open way" the Carter administration approached Moscow. A quiet approach would have been better, he said, adding that Carter could have placed sanctions on the Soviet Union such as eliminating scientific exchanges or certain purchases.

"The Soviets understand things like that and they would have recognized it," Ford explained.

Foreign Policy

Several times during the day, at the news conference and in the classrooms Ford emphasized that foreign policy should be left to the president and the secretary of state.

Regarding the recent Middle East visit by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Ford said, "Every American citizen has the right to travel overseas. No American citizen has the right to undertake foreign policy decision making."

Ford lunched at Alumni House with Speng and student leaders of the law school. The law school's student legal forum was one of the prime movers to get Ford on campus.

Also yesterday, Ford returned to Phi Beta Kappa Hall, the scene of his Oct. 22, 1976, campaign debate with Jimmy Carter. In the lobby, he dedicated a small tablet, presented to the college by the Society of the Alumni, noting the site of the debate.

Last night Ford attended a brief reception at the president's house and then had dinner with about 50 guests in the Great Hall of the Wren Building where his news conference had been held.