

## Ford criticizes Carter's economic policies

WILLIAMSBURG (AP) — "Our problems are very serious...it could have been avoided," former President Gerald Ford says of President Carter's handling of the nation's economic policy.

Ford told an audience of some 3,500 people at the College of William & Mary here Wednesday night Carter ruined a healthy economy through excessive government spending.

"In 1977, President Carter had the economic platter turned over to him and it was in good health," the former president told a cheering audience.

"The administration's economic policies have been a disaster."

During his administration, Ford said, inflation was reduced to 4.8 percent, the prime interest rate dropped to 6.25 percent and employment was rising.

But when Carter moved into the White House, Ford said, government spending increased, escalating inflation, interest rates and unemployment.

"I hope for the best," he added. "We can still recover."

Ford also lashed Carter's reaction to the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba.

"It's unfortunate that an American president for the first time accepted the presence of armed hostile forces in the Western Hemisphere," he said.

At a news conference here Wednesday morning and again in a lecture to a law class, Ford said Carter should have used quiet diplomacy with the Soviets instead of dealing with the situation publicly.

"It got to be a very hard job for the Soviet Union, without losing face, to do anything

visible" about the troops, Ford said.

Ford said he would have approved "a significant reduction in the number and an obvious departure of X percentage of the forces."

"Saying they're unacceptable, then accepting them, shows a weakness," he said.

During his administration, Ford said, "at no time did the intelligence community in any way advise us of the presence of an organized combat brigade of Soviet troops in Cuba."

Ford added his administration was aware of Soviet military training personnel in Cuba.

Throughout the day here, the first stop on a two-day speaking tour, Ford repeatedly denied he was a candidate for the Republican nomination for president in 1980.

The former president earlier in the day was firm

that he was not a candidate for the nomination.

But asked if he would accept a draft at the GOP national convention, Ford said, "I have never ducked my responsibility, political or otherwise."

Later, Ford evoked cheers and applause from an audience when he said, "I could do better in 1980 if by any remote chance I should be the candidate."

Ford also criticized the Department of Energy.

"They spend around \$20 billion, they have a vast bureaucracy and to my knowledge they haven't produced a single barrel of domestic crude oil," Ford said.

"I see no justification why we should pay OPEC \$24 a barrel for crude oil and pay domestic producers \$14 to \$15 a barrel."