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Byrd Doubts Ford's Ability To Lead Nation

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va., Sept. 16—Senate Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) charged today that President Ford's initial actions in the White House indicate he "may lack the decisiveness that is so needed" to cope with major national problems, including the economy.

In a speech to Southern Democratic state chairmen here, Byrd renewed his attack on Mr. Ford's pardon of former President Nixon but broadened this to include doubts about the new President's leadership capabilities.

"I have always believed—and I still believe—Mr. Ford to be a decent guy, but it will take more than that to make the country run," said Byrd. "The problems confronting him are going to require initiative and hard choices, and there are already indications that he may lack the decisiveness that is so needed to cope with the nagging and agonizing problems that weigh too heavily upon all of us at this time in our history."

Byrd said signs of indecisiveness include Mr. Ford's delay in choosing a vice president and "delay" in coming to grips with inflation by forceful action, including changing presidential economic advisers and adopting a comprehensive plan for dealing with all facets of the country's economic problems.

As for the Nixon pardon, Byrd said it "ties him, although tangentially, with the Watergate cover-up in that he aborted the judicial process" and indicates that Mr. Ford "missed the whole point of Watergate."

Byrd also appealed for a "middle course" for the Democratic Party, a theme that was also struck by other speakers and appeared to strike a responsive chord with the Democratic chairmen or their representatives from eleven Southern states who gathered here for a special meeting Sunday and Monday.

The chairmen's chief business was discussion of the controversial draft charter that will be acted upon by the mid-term Democratic mini-convention in Kansas City this December, and today they indicated they were generally in

sympathy with the proposed reforms.

Differences of opinion, they said in a unanimous joint statement after a three-hour closed session, are "more apparent than real."

"... We found wide agreement on most all of the major issues involved," they said. "And on those matters where disagreement exists, the extent and range of disagreement is quite narrow."

Alabama's Robert Vance, president of the National Association of Democratic State Chairmen, said intra-party disagreements remain over enforcement language for anti-discrimination provisions, but predicted negotiations would produce a "tolerable middle ground" compromise before the December convention.

Hence, he said, the Southern chairmen avoided taking a position on proposed alternatives, despite earlier speculation that they might do so.

Vance said he "could live with" any of the proposals and Virginia Democratic Chairman Joseph Fitzpatrick, who organized the chairmen's meeting, said he believed all the Southern chairmen felt the same way.

Vance said there could also be serious disputes over a proposal for mandatory proportional representation for all presidential candidates in the delegate selection process but hoped preliminary discussion of the issue would head off the kind of walk-out that disrupted the charter commission's last meeting in August.