

Ford Inquiry Hears Contrasting Views

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Gerald R. Ford was variously pictured today as little more than "a messenger from the White House" and as another potentially great Harry S. Truman.

The conflicting views of his leadership qualities emerged during a day-long quiet, thoughtful discussion by the House Judiciary Committee on a question that has troubled at least a minority of the members of Congress: What kind of Vice President or President would Mr. Ford become?

Declaring that he had "very serious reservations" about the Vice-Presidential nominee, Representative John F. Seiberling Jr., Democrat of Ohio, observed, "the country deserves something better than second best."

But another Democrat, Representative Edward P. Boland of Massachusetts, told the committee: "His style, his rhetoric are not those of a Kennedy. But he exudes the kind of confidence that I hope to see in a President. He could be the kind of President that Harry Truman became."

The often frank exchange of conflicting views was prompted, to a large extent, by testimony of Representative Michael J. Harrington, Democrat of Massachusetts, the first member of Congress to appear before either the Senate or House hearings

to oppose Mr. Ford on the ground of what he termed his lack of leadership capability.

The Harrington comments brought into the open for the first time what a small minority of Democrats have been saying privately—theat Mr. Ford is not the best qualified man that President Nixon could have chosen from his own wing of the Republican party.

"I think we should tell the President of the United States that we think he could do better," Mr. Harrington said.

Conceding that he had carefully tried to avoid the term mediocrity, he said that he felt that Mr. Ford lacked "demonstrated capacity for leadership." He said he was also concerned by the air of unreality surrounding consideration of "a member of the club"—that is, a member of the House.

Soliciting Outside Views

"It is Washington talking to Washington," he said, noting that Congress, in the confirmation process, would be casting the votes of all Americans. Congress, he said, should be soliciting the views of "the people of Presque Isle, Me., or Montclair, N. J., or Hitchcock, Tex., or Sioux City, Iowa."

Republican members of the committee protested against the Harrington assessment of the nominee, but there were no raised voices nor angry denunciations.

"A leader doesn't have to be flamboyant, he doesn't have to

be a matinee idol," Representative Lawrence J. Hogan, Republican of Maryland, observed. He said that Mr. Ford "is an extremely intelligent human being, capable of going to the heart of a problem." "There couldn't have been a better choice," he added.

Representative George E. Danielson, Democrat of California, appeared to dispute the Harrington assessment, too, by saying: "we're seeking a Messiah. I've never met a Messiah here on earth. The best we can do is find a best human being."

Even the critics of Mr. Ford's nomination conceded that he was honest and candid and a man of integrity. But the small number of Democrats expected to oppose the nomination—perhaps eight or so of the 37 members on the committee—will do so on two different grounds.

One group has expressed reservations about his capacity to lead in a time of national crisis in the event Mr. Nixon does not serve out his term.

"He appears more as a messenger from the White House than a person coming to grips with serious problems," Mr. Seiberling said.

Another group has protested his political philosophy, as expressed in his efforts to cripple many key civil rights bills and his past opposition to such social welfare legislation as Medicare and Federal aid to public schools.