

Cannon, Watched by Agents,

By Spencer Rich

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With FBI agents standing by, Sen. Howard W. Cannon is reading a 1,400-page "raw file" compiled by the FBI over the past two weeks on vice presidential nominee Gerald B. Ford in preparation for Senate confirmation hearings that will start Thursday.

The Nevada Democrat, chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, said the agents bring him the file each day, wait while he reads from it, and take it away when he's finished. He can take notes but can't make copies of the original.

The file is the product of the "full field investigation" ordered by the Rules Committee on Oct. 13, the day after President Nixon announced his choice of House Minority Leader Ford to succeed Spiro Agnew as Vice President. The Justice

Department said FBI agents have interviewed more than 500 people in the past two weeks.

Ford, a House member for 25 years, will be the leadoff witness at the hearings Thursday. Cannon said yesterday that he hopes committee consideration can be completed and the nomination sent to the Senate floor "well before Thanksgiving." Confirmation requires a majority vote in both houses of Congress.

Cannon disclosed that, with himself abstaining, the committee had voted unanimously to accept a procedure for use of the FBI raw file outlined Oct. 24 by acting Attorney General Robert H. Bork in a letter to Cannon.

The raw file is simply a compendium of information, rumors, reports and other unevaluated, and in many cases unverified bits of in-

formation gathered in the FBI net during its full field investigation. According to Cannon, Bork said that to make such unevaluated raw information available to all nine members of the Rules Committee might (through leakage presumably) damage "the rights and interests of innocent parties."

Therefore, Bork said, access to the raw file would be limited to Cannon and to the committee's senior Republican, Marlow W. Cook (Ky.). Cannon said an assistant attorney general, whom he didn't identify, had previously promised to supply summaries of the raw file to other committee members, but Bork had withdrawn this offer. Cannon said that, instead, he and Cook would make summaries for the other members.

When reporters asked whether Cannon didn't consider the nomination of a

potential future President so important that the raw file should be made available to all committee members, he said he had been informed that the procedure customarily used on major nominations before the Judiciary Committee is to make raw files available only to the chairman, and that was to be followed in the present case with the Rules Committee.

Rules members Robert P. Griffin (R-Mich.), Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), and Harrison A. Williams Jr. (D-N.J.) all said they were satisfied to have Cannon and Cook read the raw reports and make summaries for the committee.

Cannon said that so far he has read 900 of the 1,400 pages of raw reports and more material may be forthcoming. He said the FBI agents were all thoroughly familiar with the contents of

Reads Raw FBI File on Ford

the file and were handy for "questions I may have."

Cannon said the committee had also been receiving information from investigations from its own staff and confirmed that he had received "an affidavit ... from Mr. Winter-Berger," a former lobbyist who, according to press reports, has accused Ford of taking an unrepaid \$15,000 loan. Ford's office has denied the Winter-Berger allegations.

Ford is the first vice presidential nominee — and potential President — ever to be subjected to an FBI report and Committee probe such as is being conducted by the Senate Rules and House Judiciary committees. All other nominees have been chosen by their political parties. The 25th Amendment, ratified in 1967, calls for majority approval in both chambers when the

vice presidency is vacant and the President nominates a successor.

There has been considerable speculation about Democratic plots to hold up Ford and throw out President Nixon, thereby letting the presidency fall to House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) who is next in line of succession, but Democratic leaders have been calling these stories absurd.

Yesterday, after a meeting, Albert and Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield issued a statement calling for the Ford nomination to "proceed with all due deliberateness in both houses. Barring objections of substance, the leadership was hopeful that the nomination would be considered for confirmation by both houses during the current session."

When reporters asked

whether "all due deliberateness" might be hinting at a delay, Albert, Mansfield and Senate Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), who is a member of the Rules Committee, absolutely denied this interpretation, saying they want the Ford nomination to go forward.

As for impeachment of the President, Mansfield said the decision was completely up to the House, but in his opinion, "the call for impeachment or resignation has increased tremendously over the past week or so, based on mail members have received, but I don't think it is yet a possibility or a probability."

The House Judiciary Committee, which is gearing up both to consider the Ford nomination and to determine whether President Nixon should be impeached, will not be ready to begin

its hearings on Ford this week, according to an aide to Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.).

A Justice Department spokesman said the practice of providing FBI raw reports, but limiting them to the chairman, or at best the chairman and senior minority member, was well established.

He said the practice of providing raw reports had started under Attorney General Herbert Brownell in the 1950s. In recent years, he said, Senate Judiciary Chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) had received raw reports on Supreme Court nominees like William Rehnquist, G. Harrold Carswell, Clement F. Haynsworth and Lewis F. Powell and Attorney General nominee Richard Kleindienst. The chairman then briefed the rest of the committee, he said.