

Nixon's 'loyalty payment'

WASHINGTON — On too many occasions these past five years, this observer of the Washington scene has felt compelled to ask: "Where does President Nixon find them?"

Spiro T. Agnew. G. Harrold Carswell. John Ehrlichman. John Mitchell. G. Gordon Liddy.

In nominating Rep. Gerald R. Ford to be the next Vice President, Mr. Nixon rose above the Carswell mediocrity. In Ford he chose a man who, by the known record, bears no taint of the crookedness and corruption that has engulfed so many of Mr. Nixon's other men.

The naming of Ford is dismaying evidence that Richard Nixon still thinks the measure of a man's greatness is his loyalty to Richard Nixon.

Ford voted for Mr. Nixon's position 83 per cent of the time. Compare that with a mere 68 per cent "loyalty" on the part of Roman Hruska, the Nebraska senator who enshrined himself in the history books by backing the Carswell nomination to the Supreme Court with the argument that the country needs a little mediocrity.

Of the 535 people in Congress, only Barber B. Conable, Jr., of Alexander, N.Y., beat Ford out (Conable was 84 per cent loyal) for the sycophant-of-the-year award.

But they've heard of Ford...leading a move to impeach Supreme Court Justice William Douglas...out-Nixoning Nixon with rhetoric against school busing after the President chose to make "forced busing" a phony but emotional campaign issue...fighting to sustain a Nixon veto of a bill that would have made the director of the Office of Management and Budget subject to Senate confirmation although Ford surely knows that this is one of the six or so most powerful jobs in the entire executive branch.

Naming Ford has extra meaning because this President faces more than the usual actuarial threats to his tenure. The Court of Appeals has ordered Mr. Nixon to yield the Watergate tapes to the Federal court. The odds are now overwhelming that even after Supreme Court consideration the President will have to make a choice of handing over tapes that could implicate him in several felonies, or of defying an order of the highest tribunal.

Either route would lead to impeachment of Mr. Nixon or his decision to resign.

Either outcome would make Ford the President of these United States.

Impeachment now seems more than remotely possible. But resignation? Mr. Nixon has insisted that he will not resign. But then, so did the man whose job Ford is taking.