

Ford View on Tapes Sought

By Spencer Rich

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Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) injected the Watergate tape recordings issue yesterday into the pending congressional confirmation of Rep. Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.) as Vice President.

Kennedy said Congress should reject the nomination "if Mr. Ford refuses to acknowledge the obligation of the President to obey the Supreme Court" in the Watergate tapes case.

"We have the right and the duty to demand a Vice President who unequivocally acknowledges the supremacy of the rule of law," said Kennedy in a statement.

Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) asserted in an interview, "We are entitled to know his views—whether he

would abide by a court ruling . . . He must answer it. He cannot duck it . . . If he says it is justified to defy the court, it most certainly will hurt his chances greatly.

Senate GOP whip Robert P. Griffin (R-Mich.), a member of the Rules Committee which met for two hours yesterday to plan the hearings on Ford's nomination, took issue with the Kennedy statement.

"I don't believe Congressman Ford's ideology or views on specific issues ought to be the basis for confirmation," said Griffin. But Griffin added his own personal view that the President "should voluntarily make the tapes available" and "I would expect the President to do so" if ordered by the Supreme Court.

Support for voluntary

Presidential release of the tapes also came yesterday from Rep. John N. Erlenborn (R-Ill.), who said in a floor speech that he believes release of the tapes to a district court, for use of the relevant portions only, would be a good solution to the present impasse. Rep. Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.) reportedly expressed the same view.

Griffin hit out at the idea that some in Congress want to hold the Ford nomination hostage until the President hands over the tapes. "It would be an unconscionable frustration of the constitutional process if Congress were to stoop so low—to play political hanky-panky by holding the Ford nomination hostage."

After the Rules Committee meeting yesterday, Chairman Howard Cannon (D-Nev.) told reporters that he had spoken with Ford and the nominee had agreed to make available all financial records and tax returns the committee may wish to see. He also said, "I have been assured the IRS and FBI have been directed by the President—by the White House—to cooperate very fully" with a committee request that IRS audit the last three years of Ford's tax returns."

Moreover, said Cannon, "I have been assured that FBI reports will come to the committee directly from the FBI and will not be screened by any other agency"—such as the White House staff—before reaching the committee.