

SENATE UNIT SETS HEARINGS ON FORD

Vice-Presidential Nominee
Will Be First Witness at
Public Meeting Thursday

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 29—The Senate Rules Committee decided today to begin public hearings Thursday on the nomination of Representative Gerald R. Ford of Michigan to be Vice President.

Senator Howard W. Cannon, Democrat of Nevada, who is chairman of the committee, said Mr. Ford would be the first witness and that the committee hoped to send the nomination to the Senate floor "well before Thanksgiving."

Senator Cannon disclosed that the Justice Department had "changed somewhat" the ground rules for making available to the committee information on Mr. Ford's background that had been gathered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Initially, Mr. Cannon said, he was told by an Assistant Attorney General, whom he did not identify, that the F.B.I.'s raw data on Mr. Ford would be made available to him and to Senator Marlow W. Cook of Kentucky, the ranking Republican on the committee, and that F.B.I. summaries of the results of the investigation would be given to the seven other members of the panel.

Bork Letter Cited

Instead, Mr. Cannon said, acting Attorney General Robert H. Bork wrote him last Wednesday to say that the raw data would be made available as planned to Mr. Cannon and to Mr. Cook but that the F.B.I. summaries would not be provided to the other Senators on the committee.

Mr. Cannon said that he and Mr. Cook would make their own summaries of the data for the other Senators. He added that the other committee members had approved the change in procedure, although he had preferred the initial arrangement.

According to Mr. Cannon, the revised arrangement is similar

to that followed by the Justice Department in providing F.B.I. information on other nominees who are screened by the Senate judiciary Committee.

Mr. Bork told the Senator that the aim was to limit access to the bureau's information to protect persons named in the raw data from unsubstantiated allegations.

Three other Senators on the committee — Robert P. Griffin, Republican of Michigan; Clairborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island, and Harrison A. Williams Jr., Democrat of New Jersey — stood beside Mr. Cannon as he talked with reporters and said the revised ground rules were satisfactory to them.

Additional Data Sought

Mr. Cannon said he had already seen about 900 pages of the 1,400 pages of the F.B.I. data and had "asked for additional information on some points." He declined to say what additional information he had requested and said that what he had seen so far had been "very, very thorough."

The Senator said that F.B.I. agents had been with him while he reviewed the files. He said he had made "some notes" but could not copy any of the documents, which were kept in the custody of the agents.

Mr. Ford told a reporter last weekend he understood that 70 extra F.B.I. agents had been in his home town of Grand Rapids to conduct the investigation. "That's fine; I'm delighted," he said.

Mr. Cannon said he did not know yet how long the hearings would continue or how many other witnesses would appear. The House Judiciary Committee has not yet announced when it will begin hearings on Mr. Ford's nomination, which must be confirmed by a majority vote of the Senate and the House.

Earlier today Democratic Congressional leaders, headed by the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, and the House Speaker, Carl Albert of Oklahoma, met and issued a joint statement saying that both houses should proceed "with all due deliberateness" to consider the nomination.

"Barring objections of substance, the leadership was hopeful that the nomination would be considered for confirmation by both houses during the current session," the statement said.

Mr. Albert was asked if the statement had raised the possibility that both houses might not complete action on the nomination this year. "There's no doubt in my mind," the Speaker replied as he rushed off to the House floor. Glancing at a copy of the leadership statement, he added, "I didn't write that."