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Vice-Presidential designate Gerald R. Ford, left, speaking informally to Peter W. Rodino Jr., right, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, as the committee started its hearings yesterday on Mr. Ford's nomination. Joining in were Edward Hutchinson, in glasses, of Michigan and Hamilton Fish Jr. of New York.

Ford Claims Role in Nixon Shift

By MARJORIE HUNTER

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 15—Gerald R. Ford indicated today that he had had a key role in persuading President Nixon to be more forthright about the Watergate matter, both with Congress and the American people.

His comments on how he has sought to repair the President's "credibility image" came during day-long questioning by the House Judiciary Committee, which is considering his nomination as Vice President.

The Senate Rules Committee, meantime, agreed today to vote Tuesday morning on the Ford nomination. Senator Howard W. Cannon, Democrat of Nevada, the chairman, predicted that Mr. Ford's nomination would be supported by the committee, probably unanimously. Full Senate action would probably come a week later, he suggested.

The opening round of House hearings was in stark contrast to the relatively smooth progress of the Ford nomination in the Senate committee, with indications that Mr. Ford might encounter far stiffer examination on his own home ground than he did from the Senators.

Democrats Object

Just as Mr. Ford was about to deliver his opening statement today, Representative John Conyers Jr., Democrat of Michigan, broke in to object to consideration of the Ford nomination before action on

pending resolutions calling for the impeachment of President Nixon. His protests were echoed later by several other Democrats.

A possible cloud over quick confirmation emerged today, too, when questions were raised about Mr. Ford's role in seeking the impeachment of Associate Justice William O. Douglas of the United States Supreme Court three years ago.

But the opening round of questioning centered largely on Mr. Ford's views on a number of matters—executive privilege, the Watergate tapes, relations with Congress—in which both Democrats and Republicans have found themselves at odds with President Nixon.

Cites Persuasiveness

Mr. Ford conceded that the President's credibility had been damaged by the Watergate affair and he said that he had sought to repair it.

In the five weeks since his nomination as Vice President, Mr. Ford said, he has persuaded the President to release the Watergate tapes to the courts, hold the current round of meetings with members of Congress and to take his case to the public by going out into the country.

Today, as in his earlier appearance before the Senate committee, Mr. Ford found himself torn between supporting the President and creating an image of his own that might smooth over disputes between the White House and Congress.

His views, he said, "are similar to those of the President but not necessarily identical." And he described some of the ways in which their views differed.

He said that he felt the President should have released the Watergate tapes earlier than he did. He said he did not think any conversation should be taped without the knowledge of everyone involved. He said that a President did not have the absolute right to executive privilege and should invoke it only when it was in the national interest.

Not a 'Rubber Stamp'

As Vice President, he assured the committee, he would not be "a rubber stamp for the President."

What could have posed a problem apparently was dispelled when Mr. Ford readily conceded that an Internal Revenue Service audit of his tax returns for the year 1967 through 1972 uncovered an underpayment of \$435.77, a sum that he has now paid.

Mr. Ford said that the deficiency represented a determination that \$871.44 he had spent for clothing for the Republican National Convention last year did not qualify as a business expense, as his certified public accountant had listed it.

He disclosed for the first time that his gross income for that period (1967 through 1972) was \$454,667.06; his net taxable income was \$375,402.26, and that his taxes were \$150,250.17.