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Congressmen Argue on Ford's Leadership Ability

Washington

Gerald R. Ford was variously pictured yesterday as little more than "a messenger from the White House" and as another potential Harry S. Truman.

The conflicting views of his leadership qualities emerged during discussion by the House Judiciary Committee on a question that has troubled at least a minority of the members of Congress: What kind of vice president or President would Ford become?

Declaring that he had "very serious reservations" about the vice presidential nominee, Representative John F. Seiberling, (Dem.-Ohio) observed: "The country deserves something better than second best."

But another Democrat, Representative Edward P. Boland of Massachusetts, told the committee: "His style, his rhetoric are not those of a Kennedy. . . but he exudes the kind of confidence that I hope to see in a President. He could be the kind of President that Harry Truman became."

The often frank exchange of conflicting views was prompted, to a large extent, by testimony of Representative Michael Harrington (Dem.-Mass.), the first member of Congress to appear before the Senate or the House hearings to oppose Ford on the ground of what he termed his lack of leadership ability.

The comments by Harrington brought into the open for the first time what a

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Ford's Advice To Governors

Memphis

Vice presidential nominee Gerald Ford told Republican governors last night to guard against party disunity which could halt GOP growth, particularly in the South.

In a veiled reference to Watergate, Ford said, "We have a great party, a great president and a great country. We also have our share of problems right now, but with that winning combination, as long as we all do our best, there is no way we can fail to succeed."

United Press

A small minority of Democrats have been saying privately — that Ford is not the best qualified man a President Nixon could have chosen from his own conservative wing of the Republican party.

"I think we should tell the President of the United States that we think he could do better," Harrington said.

Conceding that he had carefully tried to avoid the term mediocrity, Harrington said that he feels that Ford lacks "demonstrated capacity for leadership." He said he is also concerned by the

air of unreality surrounding consideration of "a member of the club," that is, a member of the House.

"If it is Washington taking to Washington," he said, noting that Congress, in the confirmation process, would be casting the votes of all Americans. Congress, he said, should be soliciting the views of "the people of Presque Isle, Me., or Montclair, N.J., or Hitchcock, Tex., or Sioux City, Iowa."

Republican members of the committee protested Harrington's assessment of the nominee, but there were no raised voices nor angry denunciations.

"A leader doesn't have to be flamboyant, he doesn't have to be a matinee idol," Representative Lawrence J. Hogan (Rep. - Md.) observed. He said that Ford "is an extremely intelligent human being, capable of going to the heart of a problem. There couldn't have been a better choice."

Representative George E. Danielson (Dem.-Calif.) appeared to dispute Harrington's assessment, too, by saying: "We're seeking a messiah. I've never met a messiah here on earth. The best we can do is find a best human being."

Even the critics of Ford's nomination conceded that he was honest and candid and a man of integrity. But the small number of Democrats expected to oppose the nomination — perhaps eight or so of the 37 members on the committee — will do so on two grounds.

One group has expressed reservations about his capacity of leadership in a time of national crisis, in the event Mr. Nixon did not serve out his term.

"He appears more as a messenger from the White House than a person coming to grips with serious problems," Seiberling said.

Another group has vigorously protested Ford's political philosophy, as expressed in his efforts to cripple many key civil rights bills and his past opposition to such social welfare legislation as Medicare and federal aid to public schools.

New York Times