

If Not Kennedy in '76, Will It Be Senator Byrd?

By Vera Glaser

Washington

Three years ago Robert C. Byrd needled Edward Kennedy, while garnering the votes that were to oust Ted as Senate majority whip.

"I do not see it as a position from which one would run for President," the West Virginian said in a jab at his Massachusetts colleague's presumed ambitions.

Now the shoe is on the other foot.

Byrd, his hair more silvery and his views less brassbound after three hard-working years as whip, is being touted for the presidency.

"Senator Byrd has proven that he has the pulse of the American people," says the Democratic chairman in Byrd's home state, and a Gallup poll rates him the choice of two percent of the Democrats, should Kennedy not run.

No two men could differ more. Kennedy was born to wealth. Byrd is self-made, an orphan who married a miner's daughter, learned to fiddle, and sawed away during his first campaign for the state legislature.

He earned his A.B. and law degrees by burning midnight oil while holding public office.

Byrd's impact on the general public came only re-



SENATOR BYRD

Watergate hero?

cently, as he grilled witnesses with devastating effect on television.

Byrd pushed L. Patrick Gray, up for confirmation as FBI director, into the admission that White House counsel John Dean probably lied to FBI questioners in the early part of the Watergate coverup.

He bored in on attorney general-designate Elliott Richardson, forcing him to yield power to a special Watergate prosecutor.

His interrogation of Vice President-designate Gerald Ford dug deep into the kind

of president Ford would make, should he inherit Nixon's job.

Byrd does it, he says, by "listening hard to what the witness says, forgetting the cameras out there. Concentrate. Don't let him evade. It takes persistence and some guts. It isn't always pleasant, particularly when one questions a fellow senator."

Over the years, Byrd has been tagged a racist (he was a youthful member of the Ku Klux Klan, which he now regrets), a hawk and an arch-conservative.

More recently, liberals have come to respect him. Wisconsin's William Proxmire called Byrd "the unsung hero of Watergate."

Despite what others say, Byrd describes himself still as "a law-and-order man, against forced busing, and for a conservative Supreme Court."

But he says he would not now speak 14 hours against the Civil Rights Act, as he did in 1964, nor would he vote for Harrold Carswell for the Supreme Court.

He'd like the U.S. to open a dialogue with Cuba and get out of SEATO, whose member nations, Byrd says, "gave us no assistance on Vietnam."

If all this indicates he is more moderate, Byrd attributes the change to his leadership position.