

The Insider

A strange evening with Nelson Rockefeller

Politics

On the Rocks

Whatever you may think of Bob Dole, here's reason to be grateful that Nelson Rockefeller isn't Gerald Ford's running-mate.

Several prominent Washingtonians are whispering about a recent dinner party performance by the lame-duck Vice-President that might have been a scene from *Night at Camp David*—the novel in which a fictional president goes off the deep end. Rocky seemed dangerously unstable (as well as in his cups) one evening not long before the Republican Convention as he dined with members of a Washington think-tank, including former Gov. Raymond P. Shafer of Pennsylvania and former HEW Undersecretary John G. Veneman, both now on Rockefeller's staff.

Rocky startled the dinner party by his absolute certainty that "Castro killed Kennedy. It must have been an awful thing for poor Bobby to know that it was his assassination attempts on Castro that got Jack killed." What's more, Rocky insistently repeated that "Castro has to be stopped," without indicating how—or what present danger the Cuban leader poses.

The Vice-President also hinted darkly of a conspiracy between African revolutionaries and American blacks, warning that black radicals, having conquered Angola, would go on to take all of Africa and then turn to the United States. Much of Rocky's fire was



Rockefeller: will Tunney talk Swahili?

reserved for Sen. John Tunney (D-Calif.), a prominent opponent of American intervention in Angola. "What will Tunney do," Rocky ranted, "when they're in Los Angeles—wear a dashiki and talk Swahili?"

Afterwards, the incredulous guests agreed not to say anything about the evening, though a few have described it to friends. They also agreed they were relieved Rockefeller would be out of office by January and no longer a heartbeat away from the presidency.

Poaching Salmon

One of the year's most interesting campaigns is raging in Vermont, where 34-year-old Scott Skinner is rated a toss-up with Governor Thomas Salmon in the Sept. 14 Democratic senatorial primary. The winner will face Senator Robert T. Stafford in November.

Early on, Skinner told friends he was "a Tom Hayden who can win." In fact, despite a countercultural tinge to his campaign, Skinner's no radical. His big issue is, according to his studies, also the biggest issue with the thrifty Vermont electorate: soaring utility costs. Skinner's pushing the Lifeline concept, which he invented and which would guarantee low-cost basic utility rates. Skinner's long-time opposition to nuclear power (he was the moving force behind Vermont's stringent nuclear safety bill, which all but banned the construction of nuclear plants in the state) has also scored him points. Another popular theme has been the need for a land bank and changes in the inheritance tax structure to preserve family farms and thwart developers.

Salmon, of course, started with a big edge, but he had hidden handicaps. Many Vermonters, liberal or conservative, view him as a bumbler and resent the fact that he reneged on a campaign promise not to increase taxes. He also seems somewhat wanting in desire: one congressperson says Salmon told him that while he didn't really want to be a senator, he had to make a move out of the governor's chair this year.

Can Skinner's campaign serve as a model for progressive candidates in other states? Not necessarily. Vermont is so small in population that the winner only needs some 12-15,000 votes—which makes it feasible for a

relative newcomer to make himself known just by shaking hands. Skinner thinks the winner's margin may be only 100 votes.

Ready when you are

Anne Armstrong, former counsellor to President Nixon and current U.S. ambassador to Britain, was considered



Armstrong: closer than we thought

more seriously for the vice-presidential nod than any press account indicated. She was backed by Betty Ford, Republican senior statesman Bryce Harlow, Deputy Campaign Chairman Stuart Spencer and James Lynn, director of the Office of Management and Budget; the moderate Vermont delegation sent Ford two letters backing her. The theory was that, as a Texan, she might satisfy the South and conservatives—and that, as a woman, she might win liberals and independents.

In the end, according to one Ford insider, the opposition of "those who are really close to the President," like Sen. Bob Griffin (R-Mich.), was crucial. Ford agreed with them that the country isn't ready for a woman veep.

Silver linings

Our rationalization of the month award goes to W. Clement Stone, the wealthy Chicago insurance executive who donated \$201,000 to Richard Nixon's campaign in 1968 and \$2 million more in 1972. Asked at his seat in the Illinois delegation at Kansas City if he had second thoughts about those contributions, he replied, "No, I'm not sorry, I'm glad I gave to Nixon. Watergate was good for the country. It allowed us to define standards of public morality."