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Ford's 'Open Door' Administration

A dramatic shift from the Nixon era of exclusionary politics to an "open door" Ford administration is now being plotted by Gerald Ford's intimates with this symbolic capstone: an offer to Sen. Hubert H Humphrey of a major post in the Ford administration.

Humphrey, the 1965 Democratic presidential nominee, is perceived by some of Vice President Ford's key advisers as the best possible Democrat for inclusion in Ford's new-style government. That new style will emphasize an open White House door, genuine bipartisanship in foreign policy and reconciliation within the Republican Party.

This is a death sentence for the royal attributes of the Nixon era with pervasive Oval Office political dominance and remoteness from both Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill. An offer to old pro Democrat Humphrey, moved by time and events to the deep center from the outer left wing of his party, is seen by some Ford operatives as the obvious catalyst for reconciliation, even if he turned down the offer.

The new style in politics would be summed up by President Ford's offer of the vice presidency to Nelson A. Rockefeller. As perceived by longtime Ford ally Melvin R. Laird and other centrist Republican leaders, nominating the world famous Rockefeller would achieve notable objectives: reassurance to foreign countries; restoration of a truly national Republican

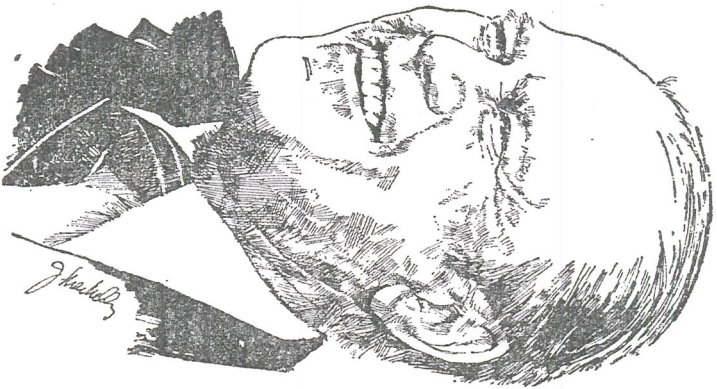
Party with an anchor in liberal Northeast for the first time since 1964; finishing the Ford succession problem (Rockefeller, 66, would be too old to run for President in 1980).

Rockefeller advocates, including Laird, advance one other major asset: Rockefeller and his vast political and financial resources could tap valuable new talent to a corrupted national government that has become the target of cynical sneers.

Ford's own staff is small and obviously inexperienced in the business of running the country. Now being eyed as high level operatives in the Ford White House are a handful of experienced Republicans who, one way or another, ran aford of the Nixon palace guard.

One is Robert Ellsworth, the former Kansas congressman who was hounded off the White House staff in 1969 by H. R. Haldeman and only recently returned to Washington as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He may be brought back in to a top job in the Ford White House perhaps as director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Others being eyed for top posts are former Sen. Charles Goodell of New York, whose campaign for reelection was sabotaged by the Nixon Oval Office, and Donald Rumsfeld (now U.S. ambassador to NATO), who as a presidential counselor had his troubles with the Haldeman-Ehrlichman clique.

Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton is a strong possibility for White House chief of staff. He never



By Jeff MacNeil

has fitted emotionally into the weird political world of Richard Nixon. Effectively sidelined by the Oval Office, he is Ford's close ally.

The major objective of Ford's political friends now pressing for such sweeping changes is psychological: to

end the Nixon era not with a whimper but with a bang. Each of these moves is designed to rehabilitate and broaden the dangerously weakened Republican Party and, at the same time, strengthen Ford's posture as a national leader by giving him, at least for the first two years, a leading Democratic ally in government.

Nobody knows whether Ford will go this far. Stone-age conservative Republicans, for example, are irrevocably opposed to Rockefeller.

On Monday night at the Republican Capitol Hill Club, a small group of conservative congressmen swore to oppose Rockefeller and vote against his confirmation. The principal reason: Rockefeller's refusal to support Barry Goldwater as nominee in 1964. They flatly discount Rockefeller's conspicuous rightward move the past few years as a futile effort to appease the conservatives and are insisting on Gov. Ronald Reagan of California.

But anti-Rockefeller animus is neither deep nor widespread. Clarke Reed, right-wing Mississippi Republican chairman and one of the party's top Dixie operatives, told us Rockefeller would be "acceptable" (though he much prefers a conservative).

Hardline Republicans oppose more than Rockefeller. They want cosmetic rather than dramatic political change between the Nixon and Ford eras, risking an ever-shrinking Republican Party. Ford's more pragmatic advisers, led by Laird, have not only the better argument but the inside track today.