

# Ford Supporters See Rockefeller As His Choice for Vice President

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NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER  
... "fits the needs"

The same Republican forces that persuaded President Nixon to choose Gerald R. Ford as the replacement for Spiro T. Agnew predicted yesterday that Nelson A. Rockefeller would become Ford's Vice President.

Melvin R. Laird, the longtime GOP congressman who served in the Nixon administration as Defense Secretary and presidential counselor, said he favored Rockefeller.

"Ford and Rockefeller will form a winning combination for the Republican Party," Laird said.

Laird has been credited with persuading the President to submit Ford's name to Congress as Vice President at a time the President favored John B. Connally—who since has been indicted for allegedly obstructing justice, committing perjury and receiving illegal payments.

But it is not Laird alone who is pushing for a Rockefeller nomination.

A source close to a lead-

ing Midwestern Republican senator said "Rockefeller fits the needs perfectly."

He said it is important to Republicans in Congress and elsewhere that Ford's choice not be someone likely to be a candidate in 1980. Rockefeller will be 72 that year.

If Ford takes office in 1974 and is elected in 1976, as is now widely assumed by Republican political leaders, he would be constitutionally ineligible to run for re-election in 1980.

Two Rockefeller associates said there is little doubt the former New York governor would accept the vice presidency if Ford selected him. One said he thought Rockefeller would accept because "it's now in the framework of a believable call to duty."

He also noted that Ford asked to remain on the National Commission on Critical Choices For Americans after he became Vice Presi-

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dent. The commission is headed by Rockefeller, who named Ford to the group when Ford was House Minority Leader.

Ford and Rockefeller have conferred frequently by phone, this associate said, but are not believed to have discussed the vice presidency.

Others who have been mentioned as vice presidential possibilities for Ford include Elliot L. Richardson, Gov. Ronald Reagan of California and Laird himself.

Reagan is not believed to have any expectation of the nomination. Laird said yesterday that he does not want to be vice president. And Richardson, who resigned as Attorney General rather than fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, is considered to have political liabilities among Republican loyalists who sup-

ported the President until his disclosures Monday that he had lied about the Watergate cover-up.

Rockefeller has many longtime foes among conservative Republicans. But he has moved in their direction in recent years and was heavily applauded last year when he addressed a convention of Southern Republican chairmen.

Also, said one GOP congressman, Rockefeller's age makes him basically acceptable to many conservatives who might otherwise oppose him.

"It's extremely unlikely that Rockefeller would seem an heir apparent when he's 72 years old," this congressman said.

One Republican leader pointed out that Rockefeller has long wanted to be Secretary of State and conceivably could serve as Vice President for two years, then accept a Cabinet post if Ford were elected in 1976. This

would give Ford another choice two years from now.

Political strategist F. Clifton White, the architect of Sen. Barry Goldwater's GOP presidential nomination in 1964, said Ford "has an amount of freedom in his choice."

"He'll be thinking about the confirmation process—the matter of congressional approval," White said.

There seems little question that Rockefeller would be confirmed if Ford nominated him. One of his advantages, said one veteran GOP congressman, is that Rockefeller, a man of vast personal wealth, has never been accused of seeking to profit from public office.

Any new Vice President will be picked by Ford in the same way that Ford was picked by the President last October after Agnew resigned.

The new vice presidential nominee will have to be confirmed by majority vote of both the Senate and the House. He will undergo hearings first—probably by the House Judiciary Committee that voted to impeach Mr. Nixon 10 days ago and by the Senate Rules Committee. These are the same two committees that held lengthy hearings on Ford's nomination as Vice President.

Then, for the first time, the United States will be governed by two men who did not win their jobs in a national election.

Instead, they will both have been selected under the second clause of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, passed just nine years ago and ratified in 1967.

The amendment, whose main sponsor was Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), was designed to fix a line of succession to the presidency and to deal with the question of what to do if the President became physically or mentally disabled.

One clause, however, was aimed at making sure the country did not go for a prolonged period without a Vice President—as it did for 14 months after President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and Lyndon B. Johnson was elevated to the presidency.

The clause dealing with the filling of a vacancy for the office of Vice President

is short and simple:

"Whenever there is a vacancy in the office of the vice president, the President shall nominate a Vice President who shall take office upon confirmation by a majority vote of both houses of Congress."

There is no time limit set for Ford to pick his nominee for the vice presidency. But President Nixon picked Ford two days after Agnew's resignation.

In the congressional debate on the amendment, most of the discussion centered on the more controversial area of presidential disability.