

'Come Home, Gerald Ford'

Damned if you do and damned if you don't: That's the wry conclusion of President Ford as he stumps across the country trying to pull Republican-congressional candidates out of the slough of despond.

He is being roundly scolded for playing the partisan game and thereby further dividing an already fractured nation. Instead he should be taking the high road of unity to pull people together for the common goal of fighting inflation. By denouncing the Democrats as big spenders in state after state, he is betraying that goal.

But it takes practically no imagination to hear the chorus of complaint that would arise if he had followed the other course and had stayed in the White House with the image of a national leader. Hard-pressed Republicans would have denounced him, as they did Richard Nixon, for being indifferent not only to their fate, but to the future of the party.

Whether he wrestled with the choice or whether he is just doing what comes naturally is of no moment, since the die is cast. He has tied his fortunes to GOP candidates, many of whom are almost certain to go down to defeat. In an election campaign marked by resounding apathy, even the President of the United States has failed to draw sizable-and-enthusiastic crowds.

In my opinion, the President made the wrong choice. I say this while real-

izing how difficult it would have been for him to say no to the appeals of one beleaguered candidate after another. The error of his choice has been compounded by his use of the threat that greatly enlarged Democratic majorities in Congress would jeopardize the administration's foreign policy initiatives.

The blame on this score is broad enough to cover both parties. An example is the foreign aid mess. Conservative Republicans have consistently voted against aid.

With aid snarled over the Turkish stand on Cyprus, the hope that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger might employ foreign-aid grants to implement a Mideast peace is deferred if not canceled. During his shuttle diplomacy earlier this year, Kissinger had encouraged Egypt to believe in a \$250-million grant which would be largely used to restore the Suez Canal and the ruined cities along the canal.

Likewise, the blame for inflation should be shared by both parties. Lyndon Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam war was one of the principal causes, with no tax increase to make up at least part of the deficit. As a member of the House of Representatives and later Minority Leader, Gerald Ford voted for every Vietnam appropriation requested by President Johnson. With one comparatively minor exception, he voted for all the big

arms bills before Congress during his 25 years there.

At times on the campaign trail Ford has made it sound as though the choice had been between sitting in his Oval Office in the White House and thinking or taking the Republican case to the country. That is an oversimplification that cannot be sustained in fact.

Sticking to the job of President, he might have helped to rescue funds for mass transit out of the clutches of the highway lobby. While his threat to veto the aid bill if it contained a ban on arms assistance to Turkey brought a compromise, a more direct and vigorous intervention might have moved aid out of the no-man's land where it languishes today.

The analogy with Harry Truman is false. Truman's give 'em hell campaign in 1948 came after he had been President for nearly four years. He was attacking a Republican majority in a Congress that had divided on more or less clear-cut party lines over social legislation. Inflation and recession were not factors.

Republicans in 1972 rang a change on George McGovern's far-out campaign promises with a plea that went "Come home, George McGovern." Maybe "Come Home, Gerald Ford" is right for a President criss-crossing the country and tying his future to a losing campaign.