

Ford's 'Spontaneous' Phone Calls

By Jack Anderson

Those friendly phone calls President Ford has been making to random Americans haven't been as spontaneous as they have seemed.

When he phoned baseball slugger Al Kaline to congratulate him on his 3,000th hit, for example, the President had a memo in front of him coaching him what to say.

Indeed, the White House has urged Cabinet members, as a side duty, to suggest people the President should call on the telephone. "I look forward," instructed presidential aide Warren Rustand, "to receiving at least one telephone recommendation from you every Friday."

The idea, according to Rustand's private memo to the Cabinet, is to "identify the President with different and worthy programs and events."

Rustand himself suggested the call to Kaline after the Detroit Tigers batting star belted his way into the sports headlines on Sept. 24. Explained Rustand in a memo intended for the President's eyes only:

"Al Kaline reached his goal of 3,000 baseball hits during a Tigers-Oriole baseball game in Baltimore last night. He is the 12th person to pass this mark.

No American Leaguer has achieved it in 39 years."

Properly impressed, President Ford telephoned Kaline in Baltimore. What the ballplayer didn't know was that Mr. Ford spoke to him from a script. The secret script, prepared by Rustand, called for the President to say:

"1. Congratulations on your 3,000th base hit.

"2. One of the nicest things about breaking this record is that it occurred in your hometown, Baltimore. However, I know your family and many friends from Michigan were with you both at the game itself and in spirit.

"3. I know you are looking forward to your retirement as a chance to spend more time with your sons (ages 17 and 13) and your family. May I say that I would like to see you continue playing the game.

"4. Congratulations, again. This puts you in an elite category among all the men who have played the game."

The President made similar calls to slugger Hank Aaron, who broke Babe Ruth's home run record; the Cleveland Indians' new manager, Frank Robinson, after he was chosen the first black to manage in the major leagues; and another black,

Simon Gourdine, who was named deputy commissioner of the National Basketball Association.

The President has also called many non-athletes, including families struck by tragedy and government employees with extraordinary records.

Footnote: In exhorting Cabinet members to provide "input for the Presidential Telephone Call Recommendation Program," the White House sent around a sample suggestion form. This provides a blank for "the name of the person you recommend be called," another line for the "suggested date call should be placed," and a space to spell out the "purpose" of the call ("preferably one sentence; two at most").

The form also calls for "background information you feel will be helpful to the President" and "talking points . . . that you recommend be made during the conversation." The Cabinet officers are further instructed: "Original plus four copies are to be sent to Warren Rustand."

Explained a White House spokesman: "When Cabinet secretaries see someone achieving something in their area, they let the White House know so the President can give them a call."

Washington Whirl—The Drug

Enforcement Agency is investigating a midwestern congressman, who has been accused of slipping drugs to his swinging friends. Informants have told federal narcotics agents that the congressman has been passing around cocaine. We spoke to the accused congressman who vehemently denied the charges.

. . . President Ford is studying three social programs that will upset his conservative supporters: a federal jobs program in case unemployment hits the predicted 7 per cent, a limited guaranteed income for the impoverished and national health insurance. . . . Publicity over the breast cancer of Betty Ford and Happy Rockefeller has increased public concern about the killer disease. Inquiries at the National Cancer Institute have shot up from about 250 to 2,500 per month.

. . . Our recent column on conditions in veterans hospitals caused a public relations crisis at the Veterans Administration. The chief medical director, John Chase, was summoned back from California to hold a press conference and release a suppressed report before our story could come out.