

G.O.P. Right Wing Seems to Rule Out Support for Ford for 1976 Campaign

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 9— Leaders of the conservative movement in Republican politics are talking about campaign strategy for 1976, seemingly with scarcely a thought of supporting President Ford as a candidate.

Most of them guess Mr. Ford will not be running, in which case they foresee an easy victory by former-Gov. Ronald Reagan of California over Vice President Rockefeller for the party's nomination. But if Mr. Ford does run for an elected term, organized conservatives here see prospects of a serious challenge within the Republican party, or else a third-party race, or both.

Signs of Discontent

Signs of right-wing discontent with the Ford Administration continue to multiply, all the more since Mr. Ford announced his new \$349-billion budget with its record peacetime deficit of \$52-billion. Among the fresh signs are the following:

¶William A. Rusher, a Reagan adviser and publisher of the weekly National Review, has just finished writing "The Case for the New Majority Party," due in April from Sheed & Ward, Inc. "What I'm talking about is the total replacement of the Republican party," Mr. Rusher explained in an interview — "the same way the Republicans replaced the Whigs." Whether the new party takes shape by 1976 or not, the chance that conservatives such as himself will support Mr. Ford is "dim," he said.

¶Senator James L. Buckley, Conservative - Republican of New York, is planning a conference here within the next three or four weeks of about 35 like-minded politicians, including Gov. Meldrim Thomson Jr. of New Hampshire and Senator Jesse A. Helms of North Carolina. Mr. Buckley says the meeting will not be explicitly anti-Ford or pro-third party, though other participants see it implicitly as both. Mr. Buckley,

meanwhile, is using words such as "awful," and "dangerous" to characterize the Ford Administration budget deficits.

¶Human Events and its right-wing columnists sound increasingly alarmed about the Ford Administration. "There is no serious evidence that the President is determined to reverse the explosive growth of government spending," the paper concludes in its upcoming issue. "It's a little early," says the Human Events editor, Thomas S. Winter, "but the chances of Conservatives supporting Ford with any enthusiasm are slim. He's not moving to reduce the size of government. These are enormous deficits and they're going to mean worse inflation."

Convention Schedule

One important test of the conservatives' cohesion and seriousness comes later this week at the American Conservative Union convention here—the first substantial gathering of the movement since President Nixon left office last Aug. 9, under threat of impeachment.

"I think it will firm up the conservative consensus that there's no stake in Ford," says Howard Phillips, a young militant who two years ago directed, and nearly dismantled, the Federal anti-poverty program on behalf of the Nixon Administration. Later Mr. Phillips formed a conservatives' Committee to Remove the President, or "CREP 2," as he called it, in mocking memory of Mr. Nixon's 1972 Committee for the Re-election of the President.

"Most of the people at that meeting will be willing to risk the third-party idea," Mr. Phillips went on in an interview this weekend. "It's a question of a leader emerging to say, 'Mush!'"

The leader in question is Mr. Regan. The retired Governor is urged by some members of his old staff, including Robert Walker and Jeff Bell, to seize the new-party initiative. Financial backers such as Holmes Tuttle have counseled Mr. Regan to stick with the Republican party. Others have urged him to wait quietly for an open-

ing. Under comparable cross pressures to address the Watergate issue at the conservatives' convention a year ago, Mr. Regan refused to attack President Nixon.

'Waiting for Regan'

Mr. Phillips said, "If he gives us a flag-waving speech as he did last year, a lot of us will be ready to give up on him. What he's got to do is strike a balance between being sufficiently critical and being fair. And he's got to give some hint he's going to be a part in the '76 thing."

A variety of motives and strategies are involved in the conservatives' planning. Some of the editors at Human Events would be satisfied to exert some budget-cutting influence on President Ford. Other conservatives think mainly about electing Ronald Reagan. Still others think less of candidates than of reviving a movement.

Mr. Phillips worries immediately about putting the new campaign subsidies to good use for conservatives. Any number of Democrats will get Federal matching money for their primary campaigns for the nomination, he notes. Mr. Phillips is determined that Mr. Regan, or a "stalking horse" for him, should exploit the same opportunity in the Republican primaries—"to get the conservative message across and soften up Jerry Ford," he said.

Conservative activists have different ideas about the next two years, but they share the confident belief that they command the money, the mailing lists and the grass-roots militancy to dominate the Republican convention in 1976, if they choose, much as they have dominated every G.O.P. convention since 1964.

In 1972, many of them supported Representative John M. Ashbrook of Ohio in an abortive challenge to President Nixon, at the height of his powers, for the Republican nomination. "But this will not be a tedious repetition of the Ashbrook campaign," Mr. Rusher said. "It will eventuate in something much more substantial, if not in the Presidency itself."