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Vice President's Growing Edginess



William Rusher

WASHINGTON'S ever-cooperative liberal press corps is sitting uneasily on a big story: the growing edginess and testiness of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, which some observers think borders on a potentially serious instability of temperament.

Rockefeller, of course, was born a multimillionaire, and recently spent 15 years as the governor and undisputed boss of New York, so the transition to life in Washington has been hard on him. As vice president, to be sure, he is not only outranked by the President but surrounded, in the Senate he presides over, by men not accustomed to tugging their forelocks to anybody. The latter fact recently led to a pair of explosions that our supposedly vigilant media were careful to play down.

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DURING the debate on amending the Senate rules to bar filibusters, Rockefeller (who was in the forefront of the liberal effort to amend) at one point flatly refused to recognize Alabama Senator James Allen, who was on his feet in plain sight, making "a parliamentary inquiry," and ordered the clerk to call the roll on a key vote.

It is possible that Rockefeller, who has only had a few weeks' experience presiding over the Senate, did not realize

what a colossal breach of senatorial etiquette he had committed; but, if not, he soon found out. Nearly a dozen senators rose to thrash him verbally in public — an unprecedented outpouring of indignation that obviously rattled Rockefeller's back teeth.

Rockefeller beat a hasty retreat, apologizing to Senator Allen and adding contritely, "In the light of the discussion that has taken place in this chamber, and my being the servant of the Senate, there is no question as to the expression of the will of the Senate, and the chair will conform."

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ROCKEFELLER thereupon flew off to speak in Detroit that evening. There he showed the first signs of strain, complaining testily of noise in the auditorium. But it was on Air Force Two, heading east afterward, that the Rockefeller temper finally and definitively boiled over.

According to one report, he hurled a glass across the plane's cabin; but the newsmen who were accompanying him reported only his surly remarks about being "fed up" with political speculation, and his gloomy insistence that President Ford would run in 1976 and he himself would be too old by 1980.