

FORD VOWS TO WIN PRESIDENCY IN '76

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Tells G.O.P. Dinner He Sees
No 'Unbeatable' Democrat
—Event Raises \$600,000
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WASHINGTON, April 15 — President Ford told a Republican fund-raising dinner tonight that he did not see an "unbeatable" Democrat among the men who hope to run against him next year.

Mr. Ford pledged to win the Presidency in his own right in 1976 on a campaign for Republican principles — including "budgetary discipline," "strong national defense," and "freedom" — not just for his own election, he said, but "for all Republicans everywhere."

The financial summary on the annual Republican dinner for Congressional campaign funds suggested that the Republicans' Watergate malady lingers on. With the President as a drawing card and Mark Russell, Washington's resident stand-up comic, telling jokes, the dinner raised about \$600,000 tonight.

\$3-Million in '69

A comparable dinner in 1969, at the peak of President Nixon's power, took in \$3-million. Last spring, during the impeachment proceeding against Mr. Nixon, the Republican dinner grossed \$700,000.

But Mr. Ford proclaimed the evening the start of a "broad resurgence of Republican strength." He added:

"One thing I learned in more than a quarter-century of political involvement is that the prospects for victory are seldom so bleak or so good as they seem when you're in the thick of a fight. Time after time, a supposedly ruined party has rebuilt and returned—stronger than ever. And repeatedly, candidates once considered unbeatable have been beaten."

As a fund-raiser, however, the dinner was a disappointment.

Accentuate the Positive

Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, the new chairman of the Republicans' Senate Campaign Committee, sought in an interview to emphasize the positive. He said he expected more "follow-up money" than usual to trickle in after the dinner tonight. And, by cutting costs, he said he hoped for larger net proceeds than last year's \$383,000. But the important "seed money" in advance of next year's House and Senate campaigns will be in short supply, he acknowledged.

Watergate memories were less a burden on tonight's dinner than the state of the economy, Senator Stevens said. The choice of April 15, the deadline for paying income taxes, as a dinner date was "unfortunate," he added.

"It's a day that means something to taxpayers," Mr. Stevens said. "They're money conscious. The economy is down, and people are thinking of other things than the 1976 campaign."

Other Explanations

Republican party officials offered other explanations for the disappointing returns this evening. Some substantial contributors are still sulking, a fund-raiser said, because they were required by a Treasury Department ruling to pay a gift tax on large contributions to the 1972 campaign.

Other contributors were put off, the fund-raiser said, by the uncertainty about certain regulations of the new political financing law.

Yet, Democrats planning their own Congressional dinner next week have not seemed hampered by the burdens the Republicans have complained about. Traditionally, the Democrats have run far behind in these yearly fund-raising contests, but their advance sale this year is the largest ever and they talk hopefully of a \$1-million dinner on April 24.

"We thought we were going to have to drag it out of people," said Nurdy Hoffman, director of the Senate Campaign Committee. "I was the most baffled guy in the world when our dinner started going like a house afire."

Contributors 'Abused'

Eddie Mahe, executive director of the Republican National Committee, said that "here's a continuing disillusionment among major contributors because they've been so abused by all these investigations." He added:

"The big edge the Democrats have is all that labor money. And having control of both branches of congress doesn't hurt, either."

Yet, there is no partisan exclusiveness about contributions to either dinner. The mainstays of the Democratic and Republican campaign dinners have long been lobbyists and political committees of special interest groups that give to both parties.

Among the buyers of \$10,000 table tickets at the Republican dinner tonight were the American Medical Association's Political Action Committee, the American Dental Association's Political Action Committee and the Real Estate Political Action Group—all of which are expected to make matching contributions to the Democrats.