



Goldwater Talks of Ford and Reagan

John D. Lofton Jr.

THE WHITE HOUSE choice of the former deputy director of the Goldwater for President Committee, Dean Burch, to head the Ford for President planning committee is a ploy obviously designed to attract dissident conservatives within the GOP to President Ford's banner. But if Burch was picked with the idea in mind to lock up Senator Barry Goldwater's support for Mr. Ford in 1976, against a possible challenge from Ronald Reagan, the tactic has failed, at least for now.

In an interview last week, Goldwater told me it was not fair to infer from his announced support of President Ford that he would oppose Reagan if the former California governor decided to go for the nomination. "No, no," he declared, "I've never said anything like that because that situation hasn't arisen and I don't gamble on hypothetical situations."

★ ★ ★

GOLDWATER says he has announced his support for Mr. Ford because Mr. Ford is the only Republican who has said he would be seeking the presidency. If Reagan were to throw his hat in the ring, the Arizona Republican says, "I would have to take a long, hard look at it and have a long, hard talk with him." Says Goldwater: "But I can't choose up sides when there are no sides to choose up."

As to the possibility — which is a nightmare for conservatives — of a pro-Ford Goldwater becoming the Rockefeller of 1976 and attacking challenger Reagan, the GOP's 1964 presidential nom-

inee says: "No, it will never reach that regardless of what position I take. We are personal friends and I don't fight battles that way."

Although Goldwater says he is flexible on a possible Reagan challenge to Mr. Ford, the senator seems to believe that Reagan will not go for it, and indeed he hints that he hopes he will not. Based on his personal conversations with the governor, the most recent of which was a little over a week ago at a private dinner, Goldwater says:

"I can tell you now that he is not planning on going for it at this time. He says he is staying in the wings, which I think is very wise, but if any changes take place in the next year, he would be available. But Reagan is not planning at this time to be a candidate."

★ ★ ★

BUT, Goldwater says, it is his impression that whether Reagan decides to run "depends on how Mr. Ford turns out in the next 10 months." If it becomes obvious to Reagan and the Republican Party that Mr. Ford "can't hack it," then the senator believes Reagan would be "pulled in" and would take Mr. Ford on within the party.

Any Reagan-Ford fight for the Republican nomination would divide Goldwater's loyalties, he says, and for him to have to choose between the two would be a "very tough" decision for him and for most other members of the GOP, which is why "I hope no decision has to be made."