

Running In Place

By George Murphy



AP Wirephoto

RONALD REAGAN
Has he waited too long?

Just where is Ronald Reagan headed?

Right now, according to own words, nowhere in particular. He's got his radio show and his weekly newspaper column, and a six-figure income, and a political

stance that is, at best, baffling.

Does he want to be president? How about vice president?

Reagan stands on the sidewalk outside the Brown Derby and says he really doesn't know what he's going to do, won't know until the fall.

Reagan will talk — is talking — about welfare, foreign policy, government spending. But as to his future, the answers are known only to him, as he thinks in his ranch in Santa Barbara, overlooking the Pacific.

Keats might well have been speaking of Reagan when he wrote (in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"):

"Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes/He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men/Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—/Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

There is some wild surmise going on these days concerning the two-term actor-governor.

On Tuesday, it was reported that a committee had been formed in Washington to promote Reagan's Presidential ambitions.

But Franklin (Lyn) Nofziger, long a Reagan aide, who set up the operation, told The Chronicle yesterday:

"The governor didn't send me back here. He didn't call me and say 'go,' and I didn't call him and say 'can I?'"

Nofziger said, "what we're doing is simply trying to put together a small committee—by the end of this month—although don't like to set deadlines, it might be sooner or later — to see what the possibilities are of Ron becoming an active candidate."

The possibilities that the former governor might win significant support for a challenge to Mr. Ford appear, however, to be waning with each passing day.

R.W. Apple Jr., the pudgy pundit of the New York Times, wrote yesterday: "... many Republicans — conservatives as well as moderates — have concluded that his delay has already damaged whatever chances he had had.

"One prominent conservative said...that...Reagan 'still has the true believers, but Ford has gotten back the people who are Republicans first and conservatives second.'"

Outside the Brown Derby on Tuesday, Reagan said he had "no interest" in second spot on the ticket with Mr. Ford.

But there are some political cynics fond of recalling that as governor, Reagan said "my feet are set in cement" against withholding state income tax. The cement later cracked.

California's only Republican statewide officeholder, Attorney General Evelle J. Younger, told The Chronicle yesterday that a Ford-Reagan ticket would be, in his opinion, "very popular" in the state.

An early supporter of Mr. Ford's election, Younger said the possibility of Reagan taking on the President in next June's primary "would be a tragedy."

Younger said he thinks Mr. Ford would win a contested primary against Reagan here, "but it would be a tough fight, one that might

well present a substantial problem for the President in the general election."

He said he feels that if Reagan were to take the second spot" it would be a happy solution. Just about everybody I know in California who is supporting the President would be happy with Governor Reagan on the ticket.

"I just don't know how the President would feel about it. I know he has great respect for Governor Reagan, but also he has great respect for Vice President Rockefeller."

Younger said that about a week ago he made what he called "a courtesy call" to Reagan, and during the conversation said "I hope you'll consider vice president."

Reagan, he said, "listened politely, but didn't comment, one way or the other."

The state's largest GOP volunteer organization, the California Republican Assembly, has for some time been urging Reagan to take Mr. Ford on, head-to-head.

CRA President Truman Campbell, of Fresno, after the President's announcement that we would run, said:

"We're urging President Ford to enter the primaries

in order to allow the rank and file to express their opinion...and give him the type of strength he would need.

"...Any other Republicans who may share an interest in seeking the White House should also declare."

(Translation: Governor Reagan, what are you going to do?)

In politics, as always, the shifting circumstances are enough to give a chameleon schizophrenia. This applies particularly to California.

But the wise money as of yesterday leans toward Mr. Ford throwing the vice presidential nomination open to the Republican convention.

This would pit Reagan against the incumbent Nelson Rockefeller.

And even though the two men enjoy what appears to be a warm personal relationship, the battle could be bloody indeed.

The conservatives would, of course, rally 'round the Reagan banner—Rockefeller equates with Jerry Rubin in their minds.

And whoever wins the nomination, Mr. Ford cannot lose, having risen above it all.