

Ford Lets Stand Criticism Of Rocky as 'No. 1 Problem'

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Brushing aside the protests of some progressive Republicans, the White House yesterday let stand, without rebuke, a statement by President Ford's campaign manager that Vice President Rockefeller constituted the "No. 1 problem" in securing the President's own nomination.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen told reporters that Mr. Ford had asked him to repeat his June 16 statement declaring his "great admiration" for Rockefeller and expressing his confidence that "both of us can convince the delegates that, individually and as a team we should both be nominated."

The press secretary said Mr. Ford had told him he still holds that view.

But Nessen repeatedly stressed that

the President had indicated no displeasure with campaign manager Howard H. (Bo) Callaway, who told reporters Wednesday night, "You and I both know that if Rockefeller took himself out, it would help with the nomination."

Callaway, warning that potential conservative challenger Ronald Reagan is leading the President in the Southern states, California and New Hampshire, also told reporters that "the President has told me very clearly he is keeping a very open mind on who he will recommend" as his running mate.

He suggested that Mr. Ford might well choose to heed the advice of party members and pick someone younger than the 67-year-old Rockefeller.

As he had done when Callaway first

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labeled Rockefeller a campaign liability two weeks ago, Nessen insisted that the statements of the campaign manager and the President were "totally consistent."

Asked if the President appeared pleased or displeased with news accounts of Callaway's Wednesday night statements, Nessen said, "I didn't see any change in his normal demeanor."

Nonetheless, the incident provoked a flurry of discussions, with Callaway calling Nessen, and Rockefeller talking twice to the President's campaign manager.

A Rockefeller aide said the talks were "friendly, open and frank. The important thing that is that Jerry Ford be elected. In the meantime, we're sticking to our knitting . . . Nobody here believes there's been a shift in opinion."

On Capitol Hill, some progressive Republicans were taking a less charitable view of the second round in Callaway's criticism of Rockefeller.

House Republican Conference Chairman John B. Anderson of Illinois said, "I don't like it a bit. I don't understand why the campaign manager finds it necessary to be the spearhead of an anti-Rockefeller campaign."

Anderson noted that "it makes it hard for the Vice President to be an advocate of the President's programs when he is being sabotaged by the President's own campaign manager."

Sen. Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass.), another progressive, said he "hoped this is not a trial balloon on the part of the President. . . . Our strongest team would be a Ford-Rockefeller ticket."

Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.), a longtime Rockefeller ally, called Callaway's statement "a great disservice to the President" and warned that dumping Rockefeller would "endanger the President's support from the whole centrist bloc in the country."

But another liberal Republican, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker of Connecticut, said he agreed that Rockefeller is too old for the 1976 ticket and suggested Brooke as a substitute.

Callaway emphasized in his remarks to reporters that the resistance to Rockefeller was found cheaply among potential Reagan supporters in the southern states.

That led one leading Senate progressive to send a letter to presidential assistant Donald Rumsfeld asking, "Is Callaway managing Reagan's campaign or Ford's?"

It was not clear how useful Callaway's tactic would be in salving Southern conservatives. One Dixie leader he said he had consulted, Mississippi Republican National Committeeman Clarke Reed, described Callaway's talk as "hokum."

In an interview, Reed said, "I trust Bo completely, but I told him, 'You're not saying anything.' The President has said (of Rockefeller), 'This is my philosophical brother,' and I don't see any way of separating them. I'll bet anybody even money, if it's Ford, it will be Rockefeller. All the rest is hokum."

Nonetheless, there were strong indications that the White House was encouraging Callaway to take the tactic of highlighting Rockefeller's political problems and suggesting there may be a switch of running mates.



RON NESSEN

. . . cites Ford remarks



HOWARD H. CALLAWAY

. . . sees '76 problem