

SFChronicle

'It's Time for A Decision' By Reagan

Wrightsville Beach, N.C.

The leaders of Ronald Reagan's undeclared presidential campaign are flying to California this week to tell the former California governor it is now or never for his White House hopes.

Faced with a widespread shift of southern Republican leadership to the side of President Ford, the Reagan strategists will press the conservative hopeful to advance his timetable for announcing his candidacy for the GOP nomination.

"It's time for a decision," said Senate Paul Laxalt (Rep-Nev.), the head of the Citizen's for Reagan organization, which was authorized last month to raise funds and conduct exploratory efforts on the feasibility of Reagan's challenging Mr. Ford.

Laxalt and John Sears, the operating director of the Reagan committee, will meet with Reagan on Wednesday and Thursday. Laxalt said yesterday, "I expect to be able to say something much more definitive" about the plans for Reagan's announcement after those meetings. He said he would press the former governor to announce his candidacy "no later than November 15, but I really hope it will be about October 1."

Laxalt and Sears spent Saturday and yesterday in this ocean-side resort town, conferring with the Republican chairmen of 12 Southern and Border states, who combined two days of meetings with fishing and boating excursions.

Laxalt said the meeting with Reagan had been planned for some time, but he acknowledged that the solidifying of support for President Ford evident here underlined the urgency of the mission.

"The atmosphere would be entirely different if Reagan were a declared candidate," Laxalt said. "I've done what I can to offset their skepticism (about his running)."

The shift to Mr. Ford and the continuing hostility to Vice President Nelson Rockefeller were the dominant themes expressed in interviews by most of the Dixie chairmen over the weekend.

Clark Reed of Mississippi, the head of the state chairmen's association and a self-proclaimed neutral in the prospective Reagan-Ford clash, said, "There's a lot stronger Ford sentiment than I had thought. They're thinking Reagan is a little late getting into it and Ford is beginning to look like a winner. People are more inclined to accept the inevitable—but that only makes them more worried about Rockefeller being on the ticket in the general election."

Ford backers, led by Howard Callaway, the head of the President's campaign committee, pronounced themselves "enormously satisfied" by the weekend discussions.

There were authoritative reports that Callaway had come away from he talks with promises of public endorsements for the President from four of the Southern state chairmen and private commitments from at least as many more.

Callaway, it was learned, won agreement from several of the pro-Ford chairmen that they would call REagan this week and urge him to withhold his candidacy on the grounds that it would divide the GOP and increase the danger of a conservative third party movement in the general election.

Factors repeatedly cited as sources of Mr. Ford's new support in the South were his vetoes of spending bills passed by the Democratic Congress, his firmness in the Mayaguez incident and his over-all support for national defense. Some chairmen also mentioned Mr. Ford's anti-busing statements.

Washington Post

Deadly Lightning Plasencia, Spain

Several thousand fish died in a small lake near here Saturday after lightning struck the water.

Associated Press