

FORD AD

# 'Noncandidate' Reagan's

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The candidate steps out of a private jet into chill, winds drizzle and confusion.

He is standing alone in the private air terminal at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. He is one of a dozen or 50 men who are in various stages of seeking the presidency of the United States; most of them are the sort of semi-knowns who are faceless even in their own rally crowds; at times, they can seem very much unrecognized and alone.

Analysis  
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Opinion

"Hey! . . . hey! . . . hey, aren't you Ronald Reagan?"

The voice, a mix of incredulity and recognition, comes from one of the several people in the small terminal, a man in a red jacket emblazoned with the word "MARRIOTT" — a shuttle-bus driver who has taken advantage of the lack of business to call his girlfriend.

The candidate, tall, slim, with a face and neck that is very lined but with the familiar taut smile and full head of brown-red hair, nods a sort of shucks-yes and goes back to nervously looking for his entourage.

"It's Ronald Reagan!" MARRIOTT now is saying into the phone. "You know, the Ronald Reagan. The governor! The movie, star! Yes . . . really . . . I'm telling you he even says he is."

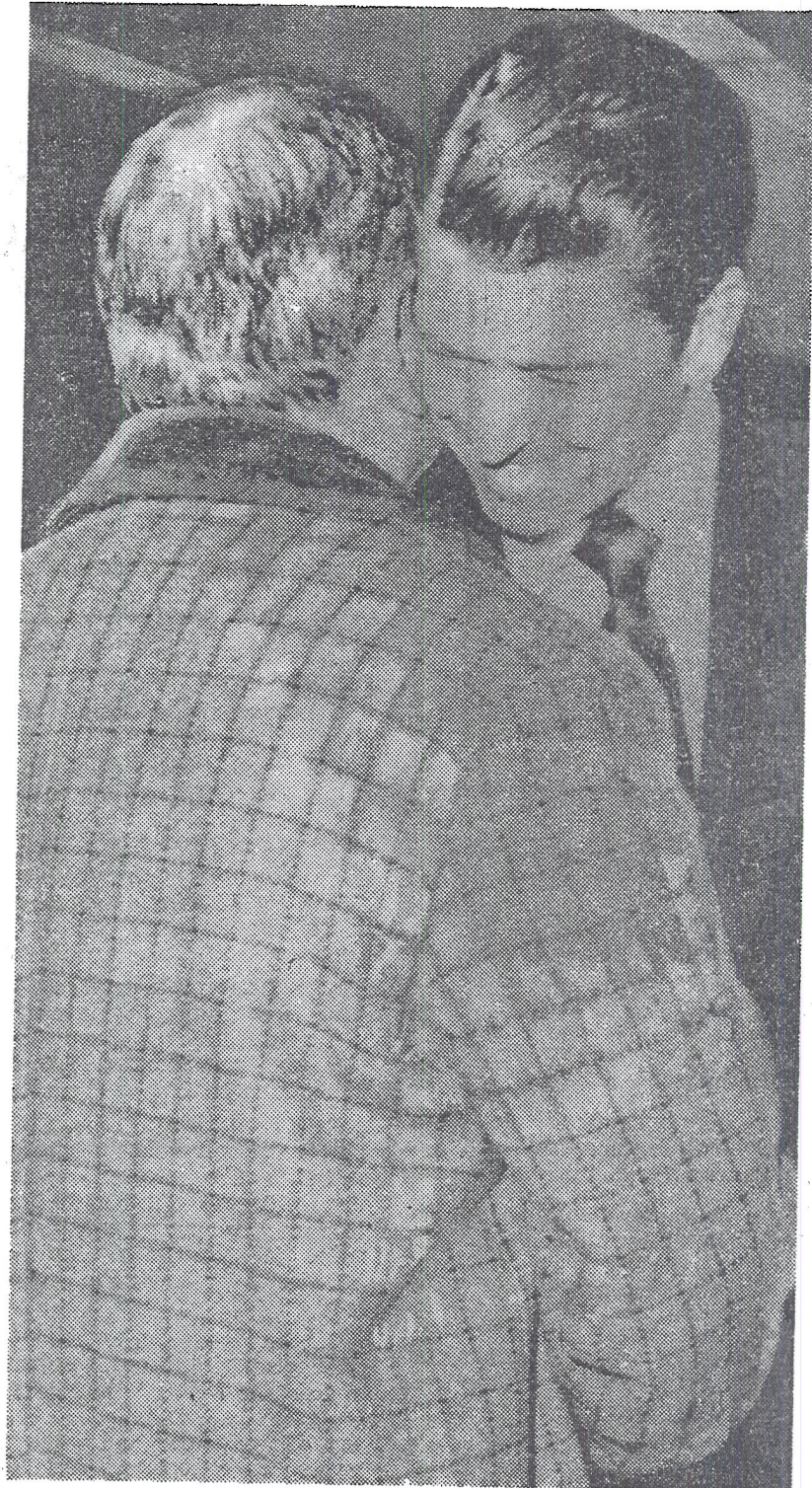
The candidate asks MARRIOTT who is on the other end and is told it is the man's girlfriend, Nancy. That, of course, clinches it.

In a flash the candidate, still trim and athletic-looking at 64, is across the corridor, taking the phone and saying with a smile, "Well, hi there, Nancy. This is Ronald Reagan and I have a wife named Nancy, so I just had to say hello to you too."

People in out-of-town airports never shriek, "Hey, aren't you Lloyd Bentsen" or ". . . Jimmy Carter!" or Scoop Jackson or Terry Sanford or Fred Harris or, on the Republican side, Howard Baker or Charlea Percy.

Yet they call out at airports for Reagan. And later during that Chicago night, he had to stop a half-dozen times to sign autographs while making his way through the lobby of the Palmer House hotel.

Ronald Reagan has more star



UPI Telephoto

After his news conference upon leaving the California governorship in January, Ronald Reagan was embraced by an admirer

quality as a politician than he did as a movie actor. Only Teddy Kennedy and maybe Hubert Humphrey come close among those who have a chance at the White House next term. This star quality is a major concern to the strategists and advisers who surround Gerald Ford, because President Ford is the man Reagan intends to take on.

Ronald Reagan maintains he is a noncandidate and that he will not make up his mind about whether to challenge Mr. Ford for the Republican nomination until November. But he also said in a

recent interview that it would take a "truly unforeseen" event like the United States becoming involved in a Mideast war for him to perhaps — perhaps — decide not to run.

The accurate way of saying it is that Ronald Reagan is indeed today very much a candidate for the presidency, a candidate who perhaps — perhaps — may decide to drop out in November only if he thinks his support is so shallow that he will embarrass himself by making a formal declaration.

The pretense of noncandidacy

# Star Quality

flies in the face of the campaign trappings that surround the Reagan effort. Reagan has spent much of the year crisscrossing the country making speeches, travels with a retinue of aides, employs campaign-style advance people to leapfrog ahead and pave the way for his appearances.

Reagan is a noncandidate with a national campaign headquarters (Citizens for Reagan) based in Washington, headed by a Republican senator, Paul Laxalt of Nevada, and a respected Republican political strategist, John Sears, who worked the Nixon campaign in 1968.

He is a noncandidate whose organization is setting up state-wide committees and a noncandidate whose national treasury will file a declaration in the next few days that it has raised about \$400,000 in campaign funds.

Reagan is a noncandidate with a strategy: He figures he must come on strong in the earliest primaries, especially New Hampshire and Florida, if he is to have a chance at unseating Mr. Ford. He is very cautious about how he discusses this matter of strategy when talking with reporters.

"Well, I've got to do well in New Hampshire and Florida," he says. Do you mean you've got to win? "That's the ultimate in 'well' . . . I'd say I have to at least come close." Are you saying that if you don't at least come close in New Hampshire and Florida that you could be knocked out of the presidential race? "I really don't honestly know."

In New Hampshire, Reagan has the backing of the Republican governor, conservative Meldrim Thomson, and the publisher of the state's dominant newspaper, William Loeb of the conservative Manchester Union Leader.

In Florida Mr. Ford has locked up the support of the Republican congressmen, but Reagan's drive there will be headed by the man who served as state Republican chairman until this year, Tommy Thomas. "I think Reagan will carry it here," said Thomas, in an interview. ". . . I know I'm talking to the wrong people, but the ones I'm talking to are 50 pro-Reagan it scares me."

Reagan knows well the complaints that he has waited too long and that this has cost him support. But he maintains that it would have been a mistake to get in any earlier.

Reagan strategist John Sears elaborated in a separate interview: "What you have to do in a

race is concentrate on gaining the maximum momentum and then holding it for only a short period — because these things do have a way of shifting and nobody can sustain momentum over the long haul without some slippage."

One of the problems of running an all-out effort while maintaining a steadfast noncandidacy, is that a politician tends to lose control of the little things that help make presidents. Consider Reagan's recent visit to Dayton, Ohio.

At all stops, Reagan attracts audiences that obviously are his people and then proceeds to entertain and motivate them masterfully. His speech is a standard that he has used, with modifications and additions, over the years. It is chock full of snappy one-liners and stories about "The little Irishman who . . ." — each leading up to a serious political point.

The thrust of his professionally delivered comments is the same as what George Wallace has been saying with folksy charm, and also much of what liberal Democrat-populists are saying as well these days: Government has become too big to deliver.

Reagan aides have long claimed that they would like to see him appear jointly with Mr. Ford. They say Reagan would look good by comparison. But Reagan now has apparently spurned an opportunity to share a stage with Mr. Ford at GOP fundraising dinners in Los Angeles and San Francisco at the end of this month.

The reason, according to one Reagan source, is that the governor does not want to risk further erosion of his support by making it appear that he has made some kind of deal with Mr. Ford, that he is not a serious candidate. (Reagan will not have formally announced his candidacy by the time of those dinners, the source said.) So Reagan will be a cohost in absentia.

Meanwhile, the Reagan camp is very much in the business of poll-taking. Preliminary national poll findings show some strength "supporting what we're trying to do," one Reagan source allowed himself to admit.

But in the next breath, the Reagan man declined to reveal the figures. "You know and I know, if it showed Reagan was 60 per cent, of course I would let you know the figures," he expained "So obviously what I'm saying is that it is good enough, for now but not that good."