

FORD AD

Did Rockefeller Give Ford a Way Out?

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 13 — Vice President Rockefeller's call for Congressional action to assist New York City, apparently totally at odds with President Ford's repeated opposition to Federal intervention, has led to confusion both in and out of the White House, and speculation over the possibility of a change in Administration policy. "It's inexplicable," said one of the President's key economic advisers.

But on Capitol Hill, a New York Representative speculated that Mr. Rockefeller had become the "point man" in an attempted Administration shift, intended to give the President room to maneuver in the event the city got its fiscal house in order and continued to gain momentum in its quest for Congressional action.

The Vice President has consistently described himself as a team player, a "staff assistant" to the President, subordinating his own views to that of his boss.

"If he wants me to go to a funeral, I go to a funeral," Mr. Rockefeller told The New York Times in an interview two weeks ago. "If he wants me to open an exhibition in London, I do it. If he wants me to go out and make a speech I do it."

Ford Statement Recalled

Nevertheless, there was confusion today on whether he had discussed his call for aid to New York City with President Ford, who said at a news conference on Thursday that he opposed such aid—a statement he had made with regularity since the fiscal crisis came out into the open last spring.

Mr. Rockefeller said today that he talked to the President almost daily and they were certain that he had discussed his remarks with Mr. Ford during one of those discussions toward the end of last week.

The implication was that the President had given at least tacit approval, and probably explicit assent, to the Vice President's remarks.

"The President didn't order him not to make the statement," said Hugh Morrow, Mr. Rockefeller's press secretary.

Such a discussion seemed even more likely in view of the fact that Mr. Rockefeller, who had been one of the architects of the Administra-

tion's hard line toward New York, had eased his position only a week earlier, when he urged that Congress consider Federal aid to ease the city's fiscal crisis.

The President nevertheless is said to have told aides this morning that Mr. Rockefeller, in his daily talks, did not discuss his specific remarks with him. He was described as "surprised" and "unhappy" over the Vice President's statement.

But Ron Nessen, the President's press secretary, when asked whether Mr. Rockefeller had discussed his statement with Mr. Ford, said: "I don't sit in on those meetings, so I can't answer the question."

A veteran of the Nixon White House suggested that the conversation between the two men had implicit assumptions. "Maybe Rockefeller didn't volunteer the explicit information, and the President didn't really want to know," he said.

A Democrat's View

"The glacier is starting to move," said Representative Benjamin S. Rosenthal, Queens Democrat and chairman of a House subcommittee that has kept in close touch with the White House on this issue.

"Ford now realizes that he cannot hold his position," Mr. Rosenthal said. "He now realizes he made a political mistake, so he sent Rocky out to see what would happen."

Some of the President's noneconomic advisers have become increasingly unhappy at the thought that he has boxed himself in on the New York City issue.

They have watched with alarm as platoons of mayors, bankers, brokers, governors and even foreign visitors have warned that a New York financial collapse could trigger a national and even an international economic crisis.

Even Dr. Arthur F. Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, testified last week that he had changed his view of the situation and that, though still not receptive to the idea of Federal aid to New York, he would no longer rule it out.

Some observers here have pointed out that it is uncharacteristic of politicians to take big risks. Most are conservative in style, and hedge their bets. In his inflexible opposition to Federal intervention, they say, Mr. Ford is taking a big risk—in the event that New York defaults and the dire predictions of many experts come to pass.

Even Treasury Secretary William E. Simon is talking more these days about the "psychological" effects of a New York default, which he says worsen every time a dire prediction is made, and can ultimately make a city default more far-reaching than it need be.

Some speculate that Mr. Rockefeller's call for Congressional action reflected nothing more than an open White House, in which the President allows subordinates to disagree with him in public.

Under this theory, there are few officials in the Ford Administration more knowledgeable about either New York or money than Mr. Rockefeller, and he was therefore allowed to speak his piece.

Others believe Mr. Ford allowed Mr. Rockefeller to play to his constituency—the Northeast establishment, which is virtually united in seeking Federal aid for the city.

Still others speculate that Mr. Rockefeller finally decided to put some distance between himself and his conservative opponents, and there are surely few issues more readily given to this purpose.

Ford's Constituency

President Ford's attitude toward New York City is believed by some to be fashioned, at least in part, by his feeling that his own natural constituency is rural, conservative and geographically far removed from the city and the Northeast generally.

His chief Republican rival appears to be Ronald Reagan, the conservative former Governor of California, and Mr. Ford apparently wishes to do nothing to antagonize the conservative constituency.

Mr. Rockefeller also appears to be a major rival of Mr. Reagan, but for the Vice Presidential nomination. The Vice President owes his present office and, possibly, any future in politics, to President Ford, and many observers believe he is therefore not inclined to antagonize his mentor.

Meanwhile, Ron Nessen insisted that nothing had changed.

"It's implicit in what the President said the other night," Mr. Nessen said. "If the city and the state do what is needed to restore the financial health and stability and responsibility to the city's affairs, then there is no need for a Federal bailout."