

Reagan scares Ford: pollster

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — Pollster Louis Harris said yesterday it seems President Ford is running scared because of Ronald Reagan's entry into the 1976 Republican presidential race.

"The acrid smell of fear seems to come out of Mr. Ford in terms of Ronald Reagan," said Harris, who shared a panel discussion on the coming campaign with National GOP chairman Mary Louise Smith at the conclusion of the National Republican Governors Association winter conference.

"The defensive posture of Ford politics has done more to make this a much closer contest than it probably normally would be," Harris said, noting it is unusual for an incumbent president to face a serious challenge within his own party.

He said Ford's reaction to Reagan's campaign is building public support for Reagan by making him look stronger than he might be.

Louie Nunn, former Kentucky governor now one of Reagan's strategists, said Ford supporters had coerced nine of the 12 governors at the conference to sign a letter backing Ford.

He said the Ford strategists had raised the specter of pet programs, such as federal revenue sharing, going down the drain if Ford isn't elected.

Ford campaign director Howard "Bo" Callaway denied that allegation. Most of the governors supported Ford before they came here, he said.

Callaway agreed Reagan presents a strong challenge, but said the President "has the respect of the American people" and will end Reagan's bid early by beating him in the first three primaries next year.
