

**Nessen Says**

**Ford Is Not Clumsy**

Vail, Colo.

Citing President Ford's near flawless skiing on the slopes of Vail Mountain, White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen yesterday termed the general impression that Mr. Ford is clumsy as "the most unconscionable misrepresentation of a president."

"This President is healthy, he is graceful and he is by far the most athletic president within memory," Nessen told a group of reporters as Mr. Ford neared the end of his Christmas vacation here.

Olympic experts and reporters who have skied with the

*Back Page Col. 3*

From Page 1

President here have termed him an excellent skier with great coordination, even on the toughest slopes.

"Even your own colleagues who ski say he is good," Nessen said. "How can you and others therefore class him as clumsy?"

Nessen spoke informally with reporters after seeing a political cartoon in the Denver Post that showed the 62-year-old chief executive skiing backward with a bystander commenting, "I understand his ski instructor is also his campaign manager."

Nessen said such portrayals were "the most unconscionable misrepresentation of the President" that could harm Mr. Ford if voters believe it with primary balloting and a national election coming up next year.

"It would be a mistake if that impression cost him votes," Nessen said.

Mr. Ford later said in answers to questions that he doubts

that the public's knowledge of his occasional falls on the ski slopes would cost him votes.

"I think there are more (skiers) that fall down than stand up," Mr. Ford told reporters.

Mr. Ford asked whether he thought the wrong impression had been conveyed of his mishaps. "No, every skier takes a fall once in a while," he replied.

Nessen said that although thousands of pictures have been taken of Mr. Ford on the slopes, the one that got the most play in newspapers around the country was one showing the President falling.

This, he said, has added to the general impression that Mr. Ford is not coordinated, an impression dating back to last June when a widely used series of pictures showed Mr. Ford falling down some steps on an airplane ramp at Salzburg, Austria.

Since then every slight stumble or mishap has been given wide publicity, Nessen said.

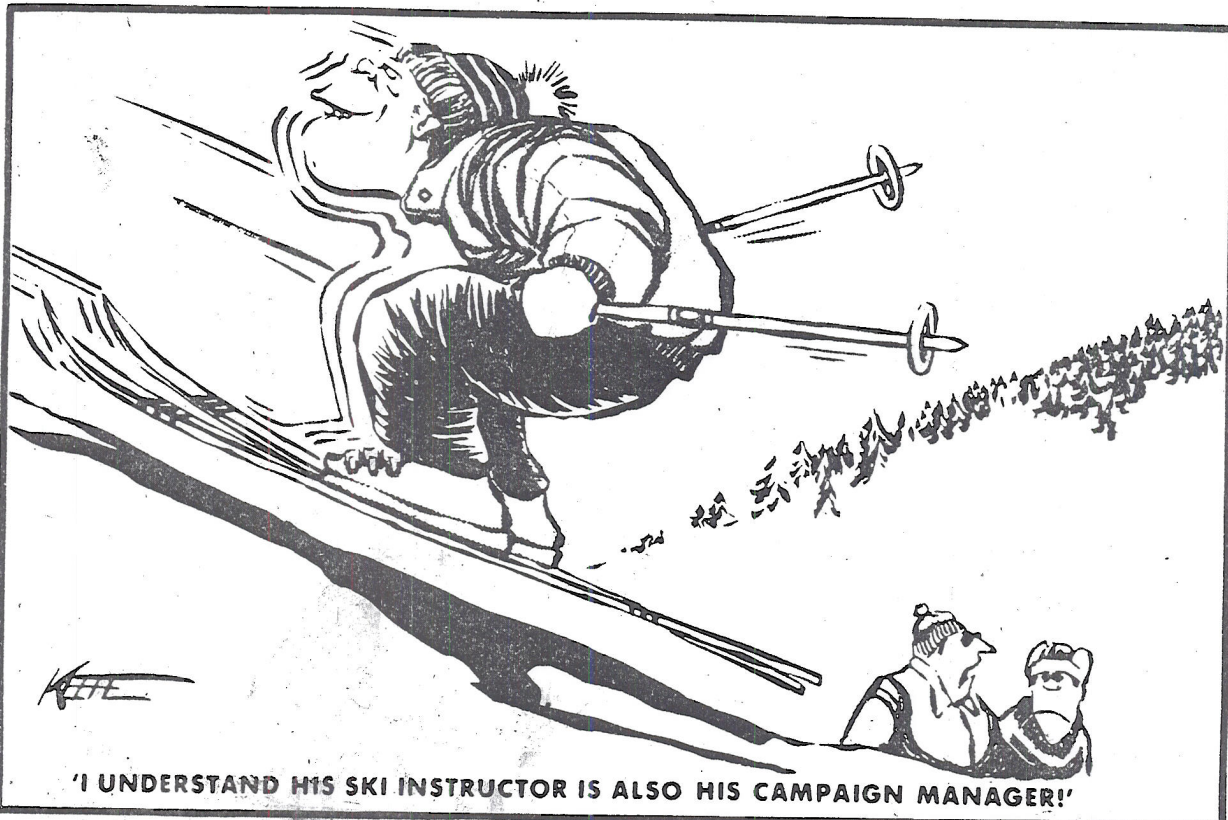
"I don't think it is fair," Nessen said. He said it doesn't bother the President, "because he knows he's coordinated. But it bothers some of his staff members who feel the wrong impression is being conveyed. It would be a mistake if that impression cost him votes."

He said he hoped the news media would be more accurate in its reporting on this matter.

Three reporters who skied with Mr. Ford for three hours Saturday all gave him high marks and said he didn't fall once. They said he easily attacked very tough slopes.

Among Mr. Ford's skiing companions yesterday were former Olympic ski champion Susan Chaffee and former Postmaster General Winton Blount.

*Associated Press*



This Denver Post cartoon provoked Ron Nessen's ire

UPI Telephoto