

# Rockefeller, Despite Odds, Still Eyes Presidency

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Vice President Rockefeller, regarded as a pariah by many in his own party, called a liability by President Ford's campaign staff and losing influence within the Ford Administration, has still declined to abandon his lifelong ambition to be President of the United States.

For Mr. Rockefeller, who will be 68 years old by Election Day, this year may be his last chance at the Presidency. But as Vice President to a President seeking the office again, that chance seems slim indeed right now.

To keep his flickering hopes alive, Mr. Rockefeller has been threading a narrow and difficult path between demonstrating loyalty to President Ford and positioning himself to remain available should Mr. Ford falter.

Before the weekend, he told an interviewer riding with him aboard Air Force Two that he could visualize no circumstances under which he would resign the Vice Presidency before his term expires next Jan. 20. Thus he seemingly has ruled out a direct challenge to Mr. Ford as long as the President remains in contention for the Republican nomination.

Mr. Rockefeller's public posture has been that of a restrained but impeccable loyalist. He has reiterated that President Ford is "my candidate" and predicted that Mr. Ford would win the New Hampshire and Florida primaries and go

on to take the party's nomination. In almost all his public statements, Mr. Rockefeller has praised Mr. Ford for his "courage" and "realism" in taking unpopular policy decisions.

At the same time, however, he has taken pains to make it clear that he is still available as a Presidential candidate. Asked by reporters for WAVE-TV in Louisville, Ky., last week if he still had Presidential aspirations, he noted that he had made "no Sherman-like statements."

Meanwhile, his efforts on behalf of President Ford's election campaign have been minimal. He has attended only two events sponsored by the Ford campaign committee, one a fund-raiser at his apartment in New York and the other a brief appearance at a fund-raising affair in Dearborn, Mich. He carefully pointed out that these were not campaign speeches but fund-raising events.

### Hasn't Been Asked

As of now, he says, he has no other campaign appearances on behalf of President Ford listed on his schedule.

"I would campaign if anybody asked me to," he says when asked about his lack of effort. But he said that neither the President nor the President's campaign staff had asked him.

In fact, he said, he was called a "liability" to the President by members of the President Ford Committee and was asked specifically to stay out of Florida by Representative Louis Frey Jr., Mr. Ford's campaign chairman in the state.

In any case, Mr. Rockefeller said, he did not want to go campaigning in the primaries and then be blamed should Mr. Ford lose. He said he was blamed unjustly for the Presidential defeats of Richard M. Nixon in 1960 and Barry Goldwater in 1964 and did not want to suffer the same fate still another time.

An official in the scheduling office of the Ford campaign committee said that Mr. Rockefeller had been asked to make campaign appearances on behalf of the President in the coming months and had accepted. However, he said he could not give any specific dates or occasions.

Even if he did not have his own Presidential aspirations, Mr. Rockefeller feels inclined to distance himself from the Ford campaign. He was forced to withdraw as a possible running mate for Mr. Ford this

year because of undisguised hostility from Republican conservatives. This hostility was reflected in public utterances by the chairman of the President Ford Committee, Howard H. Callaway, and other Ford campaign officials.

Mr. Rockefeller considered that, as his political base within the Administration evaporated, his ability to influence policy decisions also began to decline.

Six months ago, he could say that he had probably had a greater impact on policy than any Vice President in the nation's history. He had persuaded Mr. Ford to adopt his proposal for a \$100 billion Energy Independence Agency despite the heated opposition of many of the President's other advisers. As vice chairman of the Domestic Council, he had held a nationwide series of hearings on domestic policy and had presented President Ford with policy recommendations for consideration as part of the President's State of the Union Message.

All that appears to have changed now. He has been relieved, at his own request, from any day-to-day involvement with the Domestic Council. If he were pressing today to have Mr. Ford accept his sweeping energy plan, it is doubtful he could prevail over the opposition of other senior staff members in the White House.

### To Bring Issues Up

The fact that he is not actively campaigning for Mr. Ford does not mean that Mr. Rockefeller has given up making public appearances. On the contrary, he is now booking a heavy schedule of speeches.

Some of the appearances are on behalf of the Republican Party. He is also making other speeches, he said, simply to bring issues he thinks important before the American people.

In short, Mr. Rockefeller is behaving a bit like a candidate for national office.

He is very relaxed about it, reflecting perhaps the odds against him as well as the fact that he doesn't have to worry about where his next meal will come from if he leaves politics. But he is unmistakably going to the country to talk about the issues that are being raised by Mr. Ford and Ronald Reagan in their campaign efforts.

At a Lincoln Day fund-raising dinner in Louisville last Thursday, for example, he pleased a crowd of several

hundred Republican donors with talk of how the nation must have more economic freedom and less regulation, bureaucracy and red tape.

When asked what he would do if Mr. Ford were soundly trounced by Mr. Reagan in the early primaries, Mr. Rockefeller dodged the question by saying that he could not envisage any sweeping victory by the former California Governor.

But he did say that Mr. Ford's campaign, along with Mr. Reagan's and all of the Democratic candidates' campaigns, had not yet caught fire. He commented that Mr. Ford, who had worked within Congress for so many years, had not yet learned to go to the people on issues.

He remarked that there were a number of candidates waiting in the wings should Mr. Ford prove vulnerable. He believes, for example, that former President Richard M. Nixon is pushing John B. Connally of Texas for the Presidential nomination, despite Mr. Nixon's presumed gratitude to Mr. Ford for pardoning him for Watergate offenses.

Among the others waiting in the wings, Mr. Rockefeller mentioned Secretary of Commerce Elliot L. Richardson and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

He did not mention himself. But he has neglected few opportunities recently to describe his own appeal to a broad electorate. He said in Louisville that had he been nominated in 1964 he would have been elected.

If Mr. Ford did drop out, Mr. Rockefeller would still be a long shot, in view of the hostility he evoked among the right wing of his party. He recalled, almost with pride, the fact that he was booed for 15 minutes at the 1964 Republican convention, which he said was a record. He attributes his unpopularity among the right wingers to what he said was their hatred of New Yorkers as well as to his independence.

But Mr. Rockefeller's handshake these days looks like the handshake of a campaigner and his smile is a candidate's smile. He has stated no long-range plans. But for a lame-duck Vice President with enormous wealth, which he can now put to use thanks to the Supreme Court decision on the campaign finance law, running for President would obviously be something to do.