

CIA

Panel Backs Bush For C.I.A. as Ford Bars Political Bid

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—The Senate Armed Services Committee voted today to approve the nomination of George Bush as Director of Central Intelligence, after President Ford ruled out the 51-year-old former member of Congress as a possible running mate in 1976.

The committee's 12-to-4 approval of Mr. Bush presumably assures his confirmation by the full Senate early next year, but several senior Congressional sources said that the political "cost" to President Ford was "excessive."

In ruling out Mr. Bush from consideration as a running mate, Mr. Ford reversed a position taken last November during an appearance on the television panel show "Meet the Press." At that time the President said he would not rule out Mr. Bush because "I don't think people with talents, individuals with capabilities and a record ought to be excluded

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from any further public service."

Mr. Bush said today that he had not contemplated his future beyond service in the C.I.A. Since it was President Ford ruling out Mr. Bush as a running mate in 1976, rather than Mr. Bush making a pledge not to run, Mr. Bush presumably would be free to accept a Vice-Presidential nomination from any other Republican or Democrat. But there is no serious suggestion that one will be offered.

Mr. Ford's action today, however, was credited with getting the nomination four votes in the Armed Services Committee and thus permitting it to be reported to the Senate floor with the committee's recommendations.

Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, who is chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and a leading opponent of Mr. Bush's nomination, said that though he would vote against confirmation, he would not lead a floor fight to halt the appointment.

Mr. Bush said in an interview that he hoped the President's action would remove "legitimate doubts of his willingness to concentrate on the intelligence post. He said he had "urged and supported" Mr. Ford's decision to take him out of the running. "I have no worries about my own future," he said.

Mr. Bush said he hoped that the full Senate could consider the matter before the Christmas recess, but that several Senators had told him that it was clear his appointment and several others would be held over until January.

Letter to Stennis

From the moment Mr. Bush was nominated in November to head the C.I.A., White House strategists have known that he faced stiff opposition from Democrats who believed his political background was unsuitable for the position.

But when the committee's public hearings on the nomination opened Monday, the opposition among Democrats to Mr. Bush seemed, one source said, "manageable," in the sense that the White House "had the votes to win in committee and on the floor."

By late Tuesday, however, the White House had learned that seven, and possibly eight, of the committee members would vote against Mr. Bush. The nominee met with Mr. Ford several times Wednesday for a total of about an hour and a half. It was the advice of White House strategists at those meetings that if Mr. Bush wanted to become C.I.A. direc-

tor without a massive battle and long delay in 1976, he must be willing to give up hopes of becoming Mr. Ford's running mate.

Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, who is a committee member, had given the President a relatively graceful opening to deal with the situation the day before when he suggested that although Mr. Bush might not want to give up his "right" to run for the Vice-Presidency, Mr. Ford could simply rule him out. By 7 P.M. yesterday, the decision had been made and Mr. Ford drafted a letter to John C. Stennis, the Mississippi Democrat who is chairman of the committee.

"Ambassador Bush and I agree that the nation's immediate foreign intelligence needs must take precedence over other considerations and there should be continuity in the C.I.A. leadership," Mr. Ford's letter said in part. "Therefore if Ambassador Bush is confirmed by the Senate as Director of Central Intelligence, I will not consider him as my Vice-Presidential running mate in 1976."

The committee met shortly before 10 A.M. and debated some 45 minutes in closed session. It voted in public session and the President's letter was given to the press.

The core of objection to Mr. Bush has been that his partisan political background might create conflict of interest problems for a Director of Central Intelligence. And a possible Vice-Presidential candidacy raised the question that Mr. Bush might leave the C.I.A. in so short a time that his service would be, as Senator Jackson put it, "merely transient."

Responsible Republican Congressional sources believe that the White House made a "strategy error" in sending up Mr. Bush's name without being "immediately willing to forget the Vice-Presidential matter" and that it hurts the President's credibility on Capitol Hill when he has to reverse his position completely to get his nominee through.

If confirmed, Mr. Bush will be a departure from the kind of men chosen to head the C.I.A. in the past. He will be the first director with a strongly partisan political background since the agency was formed in 1947.

In addition to having served as a member of Congress from Texas, Mr. Bush was chairman of the Republican National Committee and United States ambassador to the United Nations before Mr. Ford sent him to the People's Republic of China as chief of the United States Liaison Office.