

WXPost Percy, in '76 Move, Scores Others

FEB 9 1974

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Special to The Washington Post

CHICAGO, Feb. 8. — Sen. Charles H. Percy (D-Ill.) tonight frankly declared "I would like to be a candidate for President in 1976," and then blasted other contenders for doing the "non-candidate tango."

He described his competitors for the Republican nomination, without naming them, as "resistent yet persistent politicians who whirl in and out of state after state, assuring potential supporters of their immense indifference to the idea of running for President."

Percy made his remarks in a speech prepared for delivery to the annual Illinois United Republican Fund dinner in the Conrad Hilton hotel. He was the keynote speaker at the \$250-a-plate affair.

Percy is the only Republican contender who has openly admitted his ambitions for the White House. He has filed reports with governmental agencies showing he has already spent more than \$100,000 on a presidential "exploratory committee."

The senator said it was "an unfortunate fact of political life" that he had to start his presidential effort so early, but contended it is necessary in order "to enjoy any chance of success."

"Whether I actually make

the race remains to be decided, but I'm not going to deny my interests nor conceal my preparations. I will not insult your intelligence by going through the motions of the non-candidate tango," he told the partisan crowd.

Referring again to presidential frontrunners, Percy noted, "It is little wonder people are cynical about politics when the very politicians who aspire to our highest public office keep denying their obvious aspirations," adding: "We have had enough concealment, coyness, and evasion."

Yet despite his own candor, Percy failed to make the President's list of "top contenders" Wednesday when Mr. Nixon listed Govs. Nelson Rockefeller of New York, Ronald Reagan of California, former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas, and Vice President Ford as leading the GOP pack for '76.

"I'm not concerned about lists," Percy said in an interview prior to his speech. "I'm on some lists and not on others at the White House," he added in an obvious reference to his inclusion on the White House "enemies" list.

The senator said it was "typically thoughtful" of Ford to say that Percy should replace him on Nixon's list of contenders.

In his speech he indirectly took issue with White House

efforts to minimize the gravity of the Watergate affair.

"We must not put ourselves in the position of even seeming to condone or gloss over the misdeeds of Watergate. In no way, shape or form is Watergate what the Republican Party is all about, and we'd better make damn sure the American people understand it, or our party will be paying for that 'third-rate burglary' for decades to come," he said referring to an early White House characterization of the break-in.

Percy openly courted the presidential support of Illinois Republicans, some of whom have been less than enamored of his left-of-White House positions. He pledged to return regularly this year to campaign for Illinois GOP candidates as part of an accelerated fence-mending effort.

Percy's advisers say if he officially makes the presidential race, Illinois will be a "showcase" and perhaps the first of the senator's primary forays. The state's primary falls just after New Hampshire and Florida. Percy aides frequently talk of a "Midwest strategy" in which Percy would score early primary victories in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio, before moving westward to Nebraska, Oregon and California.

The senator's current exploratory operation centers on gathering information about the expanded GOP delegate selection process for 1976, when the convention will be made up of more than 2,200 delegates, compared to the 1,350 that attended the 1972 party conclave.