

# Ford Blames 'Elite Guard' For GOP Ills

By Lou Cannon

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CHICAGO, March 30—Vice President Gerald R. Ford today described President Nixon's 1972 re-election committee as "an arrogant, elite guard of political adolescents" and called on Republican candidates to pledge never again to use "outside committees" in their campaigns.

More than 1,000 Midwestern Republicans, led by a cheering Illinois Sen. Charles Percy, gave Ford a tumultuous standing ovation as he urged Republicans to learn "the political lesson of Watergate." He did not mention Mr. Nixon by name in his speech.

Ford said the GOP should insist that all potential presidential candidates for 1976—he mentioned Percy, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Ronald Reagan and John B. Connally as examples—work within the party structure and "sign in advance on the dotted line that they will not set up outside committees without the specific approval of the party itself."

The theme of this 13-state Republican conference is "looking forward." It appeared from the tone and content of many of the speeches that Republicans are doing this without including President Nixon in their plans.

Speaker after speaker extolled the Republican Party or attacked the congressional record of the Democrats without making any mention of the President.

Percy predicted that the House would impeach Mr. Nixon. He said the White House was responsible for the trend toward impeachment because the President has asked for a quick resolution of the issue while his attorneys are doing "everything conceivable" to delay it.

"That contradiction has not escaped the Congress," Percy said. "It has not escaped the American people."

The mood of disassociation from the White House was so complete in the morning session here that one woman delegate wearing a 1972 Nixon

However, presidential loyalists gained some measure of reassurance later in the day when Rockefeller defended Mr. Nixon against "those who would push him out of office or force him to resign." Rockefeller received a standing ovation when he declared: "Everyone is entitled to a fair trial, even the President of the United States."

But it was Ford who touched the deepest emotional chord at this Republican Leadership Conference.

"Never again must Americans allow an arrogant, elite guard of political adolescents like CREEP to bypass the regular Republican Party Organization," Ford said. "It is we, not they, who should dictate

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the terms of a national election."

"CREEP" is the unflattering acronym for the Committee for the Re-election of the President that often has been used by Mr. Nixon's political opponents. The official abbreviation, and the one always used by White House spokesmen, is "CRP."

In a direct criticism of the re-election strategy devised by President Nixon, Ford said that the "political failure of CREEP was a failure to reinforce the President's impressive victory" with congressional victories. The Nixon strategy was based on the belief that the President was more popular than his party and that he could carry over Republicans to victory by campaigning on his own achievements.

"The fatal defect of CREEP was that it made its own rules and thereby made its own ruin," Ford said. "It violated the historic concept of the two-party system in America and it ran literally roughshod over the seasoned political judgment and the seasoned political experience of the regular Republican Party organization in all of our 50 states.

"Our great national parties evolved along the same basic grass-root pattern of widely shared responsibility and local self-determination," the Vice President continued. "The party recruits and trains and nurtures candidates and rewards some with higher office. The party allows for the participation, of rank-and-file citizens . . . and forges its party principles from the very broad spectrum of opinions and goals.

"So I say we as Republicans have learned one great lesson from Watergate, and that is that our Republican Party organization must be the vehicle for future elections. If there are any more cliques of ambitious amateurs who want to run political campaigns, I say let the Democrats have them next time."

Accompanying the new mood of disassociation that prevailed here, and perhaps derived from it, was a resurgent optimism that Republicans can turn the tables on the Democrats in the Novem-





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Vice President Ford acknowledges applause at GOP breakfast meeting in Chicago. At left is Republican Committee Chairman George Bush.

ber elections despite a string of Democratic special election victories

An unspoken corollary of this belief is the growing expectation that Mr. Nixon might be out of office by November.

"The Democrats have a bum record in Congress," said one prominent GOP official. "If you take away the Nixon issue and Ford is President, they won't live all that much going for them in November."

Michigan Republicans were buoyed by the privately circulated results of a poll taken by the Market Opinion Research organization, which showed GOP nominee James Sparling with striking distance of Democrat Robert Traxler in a special election in the 8th Congressional District on April 16.

The district, which includes the Saginaw-Bay City area and four suburban-rural counties of Michigan's thumb region, has voted solidly Republican except during the depths of the Depression. However, Republicans now are regarded as the underdog in the special election because of the Watergate issue and high unemployment at Saginaw's General Motors plants.

The poll showed the Democratic candidate leading by more than 6 percentage points but with sufficient undecided voters to make the outcome doubtful.

Whatever the results in the Michigan 8th District, both Ford and House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes of Arizona said, Republicans still have time to reverse the trend

of Democratic victories by November.

But in a Friday night speech, Percy discussed the Republican outlook in somber terms, saying that the party is faced with the short-range problem of the President's position and the long-term problem of perennial minority status.

"Our immediate problem, of course, is that the leader of our party, the President of the United States, is in danger of being forced from office," Percy said. "... We must make it unmistakably clear that Watergate does not represent the traditional values and beliefs of the Republican Party. Let us prove to America that our party's commitment to law and orderly process is not an empty promise."