

Ford's Search for No. 2

Like a Spanish galleon under full sail, President Ford is moving with imposing grace through the most difficult transition period in the history of American government. To govern, Churchill said, is to choose, and Mr. Ford, off to a splendid start, must now choose a replacement for himself as Vice President.

Mr. Nixon's removal will not remove the mandate of the 1972 election, a mandate for the Republican Party to govern. So, obviously, Mr. Ford must choose a Republican. But he should not choose him from Congress.

There are not now enough Republicans in Congress to do God's work, which is stymieing the heavy Democratic majorities in both houses. And there will be fewer Republicans there after the November elections. Mr. Ford should not weaken Republican congressional ranks by asking a distinguished member to ascend—if that is the right word—to the vice presidency.

Nor should he cruelly deprive any state of a Republican governor.

Fortunately there are two crack-fact Republicans who do not currently hold office, Nelson Rockefeller and Elliot Richardson.

Mr. Rockefeller has become markedly more conservative after years in government, thereby confirming the

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axiom that people are conservative about that which they know. This is one reason why he would be more acceptable to rank-and-file Republicans than Mr. Richardson would be.

Another reason is that many Republicans think Mr. Richardson, a demivictim of the "Saturday Night Massacre," was guilty of premature anti-Nixonism.

Mr. Rockefeller's strength is a proven ability to mobilize talent. Mr. Ford could use him well when trying to mend our spavined government, especially in his first months in office.

When a President dies in office, his successor makes a show of preserving continuity. But when a President is removed in disgrace, his successor should initiate conspicuous change. Mr. Rockefeller, with his remarkable ability to muster men and women of

excellence, would be a great asset to Mr. Ford in the transition period.

But Mr. Rockefeller will be 68 in 1976, when President Ford will seek his full term.

Perhaps Mr. Rockefeller would be willing to serve for two years and then step aside for Mr. Richardson, who will be 56 in 1976. If that is not feasible, perhaps Mr. Ford should pick Mr. Richardson straightaway.

Mr. Richardson has had experience at or near the top of the Departments of State, Health, Education and Welfare, Defense, and Justice.

It might seem wrong to squander such talent on the vice presidency, especially considering that Vice Presidents generally don't do anything except give speeches, and rhetorical skills are the ones Mr. Richardson most notoriously lacks.

But talent should not actually disqualify anyone from serving as vice president. And it is even possible that Mr. Ford, once the Nixon carnage is swept away, could find something for Mr. Richardson to do, other than inflicting speeches on a public that has done nothing to deserve such foul treatment.

Ford is the soul of stolidity, and some people may think that his Vice President should possess a compensating peppiness. Peppiness is not the first (or even the 82nd) characteristic that Mr. Richardson's name calls to mind.

Indeed, some will say that Mr. Richardson lacks a certain sparkle, and who will say that the nation cries out for a man of irrepressible and infectious chipperness. Granted, there are moments when Mr. Richardson seems about as chipper as a character out of one of Edgar Allan Poe's less lighthearted tales.

But he only seems as bleak as a man who has swallowed the east wind. He actually has a saving sense of humor. And his reserve is just a gentleman's sense of decorous restraint. It involves no trace of pomposness.

Anyway, the important point is that Mr. Richardson, like Mr. Rockefeller, more than makes up in intelligence and integrity what he lacks in cuddliness.