

Reagan Suggests Ford Quit the Race

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HICKORY, N. C., March 18—

Ronald Reagan, struggling for survival in the Republican primaries, blithely suggested today that President Ford leave the Presidential race.

"Tell him to quit," Mr. Reagan said of the President.

He made the remark to reporters in defiance of gathering pressure from the White House for a decision by the former California Governor to end his insurgency and help strengthen Mr. Ford's candidacy in November.

Even if he should lose the sixth successive primary next Tuesday in North Carolina, Mr. Reagan said, he will continue his candidacy in expectation of a revival in subsequent Southern and Southwestern state primaries.

"For heaven's sakes, fellows, let's not be naive," Mr. Reagan told reporters who asked him about the Ford organization's broad public hints that a continuing challenge would be divisive.

"That pressure is engineered from the same place that they engineered the pressure for me not to run in the first place—the White House," Mr. Reagan said in Greensboro. "I'm not going to pay any attention to them now, when they suggest that I should quit. Tell him to quit."

He and Crowd Agree

Everywhere Mr. Reagan went as he skipped from the coastal plains to the Piedmont region and back today, he was nonetheless asked why he persisted in his candidacy. At one point, before a small crowd at the airport at Fayetteville, the candidate raised the issue himself.

"People in the White House seem to think I should be withdrawn from the campaign," he said.

Some in the crowd shouted, "No!"

"Well," Mr. Reagan said with a smile, "you took the word right out of my mouth."

He insisted, to apparently dubious television interviewers and barely exuberant partisans at rallies around the state, that he had done at least as well as planned in the early primaries and that he had, in fact, equaled vote totals that political pundits had said last fall would imperil Mr. Ford's candidacy.

But the tone of Mr. Reagan's campaign entourage was one of evident deflation.

James Stewart, the film actor, accompanied the one-time movie star turned Governor, telling rally audiences he joined the entourage because Mr. Reagan was "a friend of mine" and the way things were being handled in Washington "you and I and all of us need all the friends we can get."

The arrival of Mr. Stewart nearly upstaged his friend "Oh," gushed a woman in Greensboro, "I can't believe it! I've seen Ronald Reagan, but there's Jimmy Stewart!"

Mr. Reagan, in what observers of his campaign saw as a fresh sign of frustration, renewed his intimation that Mr. Ford, as the nominee, would be beset by memories of his predecessor, Richard M. Nixon, and Watergate.

Describing his position on Social Security to a television interviewer, Mr. Reagan said that President Ford had twisted it two weeks ago by charging that the former Governor had proposed investing the Social Security trust fund in the stock market.

"I'm sure he must have known better," Mr. Reagan said of the President. "All the way through the New Hampshire campaign, every place I spoke and every place I answered questions [Mr. Ford] had a man there with a tape recorder. There was a tape recording everything I said."

"Maybe they erased 18 minutes or something," he added.

Last week, in Illinois, Mr. Reagan alluded to the Watergate scandal as an issue that could haunt Mr. Ford in the November campaign. But Mr. Reagan employed the allusion only once, and his supporters, such as Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada, said it was an "unfortunate" mistake.

Nofziger Back in Capital

Another indication of disarray in Mr. Reagan's camp was the abrupt departure for Washington this morning of Franklin Nofziger, the candidate's spokesman. Aides dismissed the trip as "no big thing," a routine appearance at the national campaign office, but it was the first time since Mr. Reagan began his candidacy that Mr. Nofziger absented himself from the entourage.

Describing the contest here

as a close one that "could go either way," Mr. Reagan disregarded the prevalent judgment that he would lose in North Carolina. Even if he should, he told questioners, it would not be divisive to the party to continue opposing Mr. Ford.

Referring to the substantial minorities who supported him in New Hampshire, Florida and Illinois, Mr. Reagan said:

"What do you say to that half of the Republican Party? Are they no longer wanted? What do you say to the 48 percent or 47 percent? Do they go somewhere else?"

Some in his entourage read significance into a remark Mr. Reagan made in Greensboro, however, that the sudden emphasis on a possible withdrawal reflected the "effectiveness" of the President's strategy of underlining early Ford victories.

Move by Ford Denied

WASHINGTON, March 18 (UPI)—President Ford has not asked or authorized anyone to get in touch with Ronald Reagan and urge him to drop out of the Republican Presidential nomination race, the White House press secretary, Ron Nessen, said today.

Ford aides, including the President's chief political adviser, Rogers C. B. Morton, were quoted earlier as saying that Republican Congressional leaders had been asked to sound out Mr. Reagan about quitting the race.

"The President has not asked or authorized anyone to contact anyone in the Reagan organization to do this," Mr. Nessen said.

But he said that Mr. Morton was correct in saying that personal friendships and other contacts existed to allow such talk to "cross back and forth across the line."

Ford Recalling Vehicles

DETROIT, March 18 (UPI)—The Ford Motor Company announced today that it was recalling 11,600 late model buses and trucks to check for a possible defect in the front suspension that could result in a loss of steering control. Involved in the recall are 1974 and 1975 B-series bus chassis and 1975 F-series, long-wheel base trucks manufactured and sold in the United States, Ford said.