

Ford Forced To Rethink Strategy

Washington

Ronald Reagan's three latest primary victories stunned the White House yesterday, prompting President Ford's top strategists to concede that Mr. Ford is in potential danger in six upcoming crossover states, including his home state Michigan.

At an impromptu press conference in the White House Rose Garden the President said he was disappointed by Tuesday's results but continued to predict that he would be nominated at the GOP convention in Kansas City.

Behind the surface optimism, however, the President's strategists freely conceded the need to reassess campaign strategy for the five remaining primary weeks.

The re-evaluation was prompted by Reagan's impressive performance Tuesday, when he swept the Georgia and Alabama primaries, winning a total of 85 delegates in these two states and gained his first northern victory in Indiana, where he captured 45 of 54 delegates.

In a ten-day period, beginning on April 26 at Arizona and South Carolina GOP conventions and extending through four primaries, the former California governor has won 282 delegates to only 27 for Mr. Ford.

Overall, Reagan now leads the GOP presidential race with 366 delegates to 311 for the President. However, this lead is somewhat illusory because Mr. Ford is believed to be well ahead among the 310 uncommitted delegates.

Senator Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), national chairman of the Citizens for Reagan, predicted yesterday that the GOP presidential race will be decided on the "brokering" of uncommitted delegates at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City.

Both Laxalt and John P. Sears, Reagan's campaign manager, said they believed that the decision of the convention will be based on an assessment of the delegates as to which candidate can do the best against potential Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter. The Reagan

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strategists have long contended Mr. Ford is far more vulnerable than Reagan to Carter's "anti-Washington" theme.

For the first time Ford strategists yesterday acknowledged that Mr. Ford is vulnerable to Reagan also and that the President will have to markedly change his strategy if he is to win the nomination.

There is general agreement in the Ford campaign that, beginning just before the North Carolina primary March 23, Reagan's attacks on administration foreign and military policies have kept the President on the defensive.

In separate talks with reporters yesterday, Mr. Ford and White House press secretary Ron Nessen stressed three themes that they said the Ford campaign must "get across to the voters" in the next few weeks and the major accomplishments of the administration:

- Improvements in the economy, which the President has stressed from the beginning of the primary race but with little apparent impact in the most recent primaries.

"Our job is to do a better job selling," he said.

Some strategists at the Ford committee said that, while the President is doing the "selling," other Republicans, such as Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, will carry the brunt of the attack on Reagan.

Mr. Ford's strategists are most concerned about the six upcoming states where voters are permitted to participate in either primary. They are the May 18 Michigan primary, Arkansas, Idaho and Tennessee on May 25, Montana on June 1 and New Jersey on June 8. Together these states will send 262 delegates to the GOP convention.

Crossover voting was a factor in Reagan's two percentage point victory in Indiana Tuesday. A CBS-New York Times poll estimated that Reagan and Mr. Ford broke even among GOP voters while Reagan led 3-2 among Democrats and independents who voted in the Republican primary. Leaders in both parties in Indiana estimated that 150,000 Democrats and independents may have voted in the GOP primary.

On the face of it, Michigan should be a cinch for Mr. Ford. The state Republican organization is working for the President, along with a separate Ford committee headed by Republican national committeeman Peter Fletcher.

Reagan is scheduled to be in the state for slightly less than 24 hours next week.

"I'd be happy with ten per cent of the vote and twice as happy with 20 per cent," Reagan said. "If we got 25 per cent, I'd be elated."

But Ford leaders say such figures seriously understate Reagan's potential because they ignore the crossover vote.

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- The state of U.S. foreign policy. Mr. Ford has been boasting on the campaign trail that he is the first president since Dwight D. Eisenhower who could stand for election and say the United States is at peace.

- The restoration "of confidence and integrity in the White House and the presidency" since Mr. Ford succeeded Richard Nixon in August 1974.

Implicit in this last point was the suggestion that the President — who last week in Houston said he was deliberately not mentioning Mr. Nixon in his campaign statements because the Watergate era is "best forgotten" — may begin placing more emphasis on the contrast between his administration and the scandal-ridden Nixon administration.

The President acknowledged yesterday that all of these themes have, to one extent or another, already been part of his campaign.

On the Democratic side, the Tuesday results were impressive for Jimmy Carter. He swept his home state of Georgia, won the bulk of Indiana delegates, and led in the District of Columbia, where no GOP contest was held.

Carter lost only in Alabama, where Governor George C. Wallace salvaged at least home state support for his sagging campaign.

The final, unofficial vote totals in Indiana were:

REPUBLICAN

Reagan 320,356—51 per cent
Ford 303,679—49 per cent

DEMOCRATIC

Carter 413,466—68 per cent
Wallace 92,184—15 per cent
Jackson 71,116—12 per cent
McCormack 31,766—5 per cent

In Washington, D.C. a foul up over invalid paper ballots as well as personnel problems was forcing a slow count, but yesterday afternoon Carter held just over 40 per cent of the vote, Udall, who did not campaign in the district, had 26 per cent and two uncommitted slate shared the rest.

Voter turnout was very light.

The District's 14 Republican delegates, all committed to President Ford, were uncontested and were certified last month by elections officials.

And there was more bad news for his only major active challenger, Morris Udall. It was reported from Detroit that the United Auto Workers union is expected to announce today that it will work actively for Carter in the May 18 Michigan primary.

The decision is a heavy blow to Udall, who is committing ten days and virtually all his available funds to an effort to slow Carter's mo-