

The 'New' Rockefeller: A Nixon Supporter

By FRANK LYNN

There was a time when Richard Nixon—not John Lindsay — was Governor Rockefeller's favorite political ogre. But now, when the President is in the deepest trouble of his political life and many Republicans are openly antagonistic to the President, Governor Rockefeller has studiously avoided any criticism of Mr. Nixon.

News Analysis

His standard response to a crisis that has shaken the nation has been that Watergate is a personal, not a party, tragedy and that he does not

have enough facts to make any judgments about the President. Even the state's Conservative-Republican Senator, James L. Buckley, has been more critical. This week the Governor moved more overtly to defend the President when he drafted a resolution praising Mr. Nixon for his "outstanding accomplishments in international and domestic affairs." Mr. Rockefeller shepherded the resolution through the Republican Governors Conference in what he himself proudly referred to as "group dynamics."

Watergate Issue Skirted

The only mention of Watergate in the resolution was to "applaud the determination of the President to make full disclosure to the public concerning Watergate."

Why this stance for a man who, before Mr. Nixon's election, repeatedly made it plain that he was not a Nixon admirer and who, as late as 1968, opposed Mr. Nixon's nomination?

Representative Ogden R. Reid of Westchester County, a Democratic gubernatorial hopeful and onetime Rockefeller friend, raised one possible reason—that the Governor is not as indignant about Watergate and its aftermath as some other politicians are. Mr. Reid raised that possibility recently. And certainly the Governor showed no signs of indignation in a recent interview.

Instead, he argued that Watergate should be viewed "in the perspective of what the President has accomplished." He said that in any event, there was "very little Governors can do about Watergate."

Reminded that he and other Governors had often asserted their moral as well as political leadership in national affairs, Mr. Rockefeller responded: "We deplored Watergate—that's our moral position." He was referring to a Republican Governors' resolution last spring.

The Governor, in typically blunt fashion, offered another reason for his stance on Watergate. Referring to the President, he said: "Is anybody kidded that he's going to listen?"

There hasn't been much opportunity for direct listening or talking between the President and the Governor in recent months, according to Rockefeller aides. They said that in contrast to the first five years of the Nixon Presidency, when there was frequent, even late-night, telephone contact, there have been only a few direct contacts since the Watergate scandal erupted into a full-scale governmental crisis earlier this year.

Dealing With Aides

The Governor, like most other politicians, now has to deal with Alexander M. Haig Jr. or Melvin R. Laird, the President's chief domestic aides, or Secretary of State Kissinger, a longtime Rockefeller associate.

Finally, there is the reason advanced by many politicians and even conceded by Rockefeller aides—that the Governor, long considered a maverick by Republicans outside of New York State, is, as a prelude to a Presidential bid in 1976, trying to demonstrate his party

loyalty. He demonstrated it when he campaigned in New Jersey for Representative Charles Sandman, a conservative Republican, although the state's Republican Governor and Senator didn't.

One Rockefeller aide answered some liberal critics of the Governor by declaring: "We did it your way three or four times, and now we're going to try it our way." He was referring to Mr. Rockefeller's failure to win the G.O.P. Presidential nomination in earlier years because he was considered to be a liberal maverick.

'One of the Boys'

"Sometimes you have to be 'one of the boys' to get to the top," said another Rockefeller aide.

In any event, the Governor and his aides say they are not concerned about any Watergate fallout on the Governor if he seeks re-election next year.

"It's not going to help," the Governor said. But, he added running next year and won't have to worry about any Watergate fallout until 1976.

Whatever his decision next year, it is clear that he has concluded that the best route to the White House isn't via Watergate.

Christmas Tree Due Monday

The Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, a 65-foot Norway spruce, will arrive next Monday at 8 A.M. from Tenafly, N. J. Workmen will spend most of the morning raising and securing the tree, whose branch spread is 30 feet.