

Ford on GOP trail less than a success

By Robert S. Boyd
Knight News Service

WASHINGTON — President Ford is racing frantically about the country like a one-man fire department trying to keep the Republican Party from burning down.

By Nov. 5, Ford will have sprayed presidential oratory on political bonfires in at least 18 states on behalf of 50 or more GOP candidates in this fall's elections.

It's a grueling, dawn-to-midnight task, and it's an open question whether the President is doing his party any more good than if he stayed home.

During a four-state, 2,600-mile swoop through the Midwest this week, Ford vigorously defended his politicking.

"There has been some criticism that maybe the President ought to stay in the White House and work in the Oval Office and never leave the banks of the Potomac," he told a rally in Sioux Falls, S.D.

"I don't agree with that,"

he said. "The American people have a right to see their President and to hear him defend the kind of programs that he believes are in the best interest of our country."

In some cases, his visits are a dubious blessing.

For example, the President could hardly have cheered Leo Thorsness, the Republican candidate for the Senate in South Dakota against George McGovern when he mispronounced his name as "Thomsness."

Thorsness also told reporters that his prospects had been damaged by Ford's decisions to pardon Richard Nixon, grant amnesty to draft evaders, raise taxes and suspend foreign grain sales.

"I think it would have helped the Republican Party had these decisions been postponed until after the election," Thorsness said.

Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, who has also complained that Ford's actions have undermined his re-election campaign, sounded equally unenthusiastic after a private meeting with

the President.

In Lincoln, Neb., Ford twice referred to Mrs. Virginia Smith, a local candidate for Congress, as Helen Smith. When he tried to correct himself, he goofed again and called her Virginia Martin.

At that point, he became so flustered that he completely forgot to mention the name of the GOP candidate for governor, Richard Marvel, who was sitting only two seats away from him.

And when Ford went to Kansas City for boost the GOP ticket, Missouri's only Republican Congressman, Gene Taylor, was elsewhere in the state campaigning, rather than taking time to be seen with his party's leader.