

Nessen Calls Ford Trips Unrelated to Candidacy

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 26—The White House, citing "terrible political liabilities" of incumbency, said today that President Ford's extensive cross-country travels bore no direct relation to his candidacy for a full term as President.

Ron Nessen, the White House press secretary, sought to draw the distinction in announcing trips by Mr. Ford to New England next week.

He said that Mr. Ford had three separate roles—as President, as leader of the Republican party and as a candidate for the party's 1976 Presidential nomination—and that there were no plans for Mr. Ford to campaign on behalf of his own candidacy before January.

According to Mr. Nessen, the recent and prospective appearances by Mr. Ford in a number of states are all in his roles as President or party leader. He said that the Republican National Committee would submit to the Federal Election Commission a formula for assuming the costs of Mr. Ford's travels as party chief.

Spending Limits Set

The distinction is important because the campaign reform law enacted last year by Congress sets over-all limits on the amounts that White House aspirants may spend for campaign purposes, including travel.

The operation of Air Force One, the Presidential jet, costs \$2,206 an hour. Thus, the President could consume his total budget of about \$200,000 for the New Hampshire primary just by spending four days in the state if he did so as a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination.

Despite a common belief that Presidents have an edge over challengers by virtue of incumbency, Mr. Nessen said that it was his "personal observation" that "terrible political liabilities" were also involved in campaigning from the White House.

"No other candidate for office has to live with the consequences of his actions," he said.

The President must make decisions daily, Mr. Nessen continued, "and if one blows up in his face, he has to live with it."

Mr. Ford will conduct his campaign "strictly in accordance with both the spirit and the letter" of the reform law, Mr. Nessen said.

Supporters of the putative Presidential candidacy of Ronald Reagan, the former Repub-

lican Governor of California, have suggested that Mr. Ford's journeys across the nation should be counted against his campaign budget.

But Mr. Nessen said today that it was "natural and normal" for the Republican National Committee to absorb expenses of Mr. Ford's travels on behalf of the party as a whole.

'Not the First Time'

"This is not something that is happening for the first time in American history," the White House spokesman said.

He said that the national party would pay the full cost of the President's one-day visit to New England Saturday. Mr. Ford will address a hospital benefit in Augusta, Me., and party fund-raising events in Portland, Me., and Newport, R.I.

On Sept. 4, Mr. Ford is scheduled to address a regional White House conference on domestic issues in Seattle. Although the White House has yet to confirm it, he is also expected to take part in public and political meetings in California, Missouri and other states on his way to and from the Seattle conference.

These journeys come on the heels of a number of official and Republican party appearances by Mr. Ford in Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Montana, Minnesota, Illinois and Wisconsin during a two-week vacation in Vail, Colo., and on his way back to Washington.

Although Mr. Ford's political advisers have said that they expect him to benefit from exposure to the electorate in such states, Mr. Nessen insisted today that the appearances were "clearly for the benefit of the Republican party" as distinguished from Mr. Ford's candidacy.

At each of his political engagements so far, Mr. Ford has been careful to state that the 1976 elections represent an opportunity for the party as a whole and to encourage efforts to increase Republican representation in Congress and state legislatures.

Mr. Nessen declined to say if he believed the assets of incumbency outnumbered the liabilities.

"I just personally think it's important to remember the President has a number of duties as President," he said. "It is a mistake to chalk up everything he does in Washington or on the road to a vote-getting or political exercise."