

FORD AD

Rockefeller Making an Impact on Policy

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 26—President Ford's new \$100-billion energy program represents Nelson A. Rockefeller's major initiative within the Administration and makes it possible for him to say, after only nine months in office, that he has had a greater impact on policy than any Vice President before him.

He makes a point of saying it modestly as befits his self-proclaimed role as a "staff assistant" to the President. He is just trying to be "helpful" to Mr. Ford, he insists.

"If he wants me to go to a funeral, I go to a funeral," he says. "If he wants me to open an exhibition in London, I do it. If he wants me to go out and make a speech, I do it."

It was basically no different, Mr. Rockefeller says, when the President asked him to put to-



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Vice President Rockefeller

gether a program that—if it gets past Congress—will shape the nation's energy policies for the rest of the century.

In this case, however, Mr. Rockefeller asked to be asked and the proposal that emerged

bears his trademark—not only in its sweep and cost but in its reliance on an independent agency empowered to raise huge sums in the private market.

The surprise is not that Mr. Rockefeller would promote such a far-reaching proposal but that he managed to do so from the limbo of the Vice-Presidency. It is not that he has changed the office in any basic way, just that Mr. Ford has given him a limited license to step outside it.

Even so, at 67 years old, after 15 years as Governor, he has had to summon up reserves of patience and tact. The preparation of the energy plan—the only significant policy initiative he has undertaken—reflected the inherent awkwardness of his situation.

Nominally, Mr. Rockefeller is

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supposed to oversee long-range domestic policy planning as part of the responsibility President Ford gave him for the activities of the Domestic Council, a creature of John D. Ehrlichman's in the Nixon Administration that atrophied during the Watergate period and is now being slowly restored.

Last spring, Mr. Rockefeller persuaded the President to appoint two of his own aides, James M. Cannon and Richard L. Dunham, to the top staff positions on the council. In theory, this solidified a base for the Vice President within the Administration but, in practice, the council's small professional staff of 15 was overwhelmed with day-to-day White House chores.

As a result, Mr. Rockefeller's long-range work was mostly undertaken by his own staff, which is decidedly thin by Rockefeller standards. Such built-in limitations might have stymied another Vice President but just as Mr. Rockefeller has his own airplanes, he has his own networks of talent outside the Government.

On the energy plan, his key aide was a New York investment banker, William H. Donaldson, who came to Washington as a part-time consultant at the Federal Government's maximum consulting fee of \$138 a day. Mr. Donaldson had left Washington last year after a brief and unhappy stint as an Under Secretary of State and had subsequently helped direct the preliminary planning for the Administration of Governor Carey in Albany.

Also involved, according to an aide, was "a whole mash of Rockefeller advisers" whose expertise and judgment were commandeered as necessary. At one stage, the preparation of the proposal was so distinctly a Rockefeller operation that elements within the Administration with direct responsibility for energy matters became edgy.

Shift in Jurisdiction

Formal jurisdiction for the scheme was then shifted from the Domestic Council to the Energy Resources Council. "I understand the people around the President and how these things work," the Vice President said in an interview "and I was determined that I was not going to let anything get between me and the President, that I would not cause him trouble with his own people or with the Cabinet or anybody else, you see.

"Because that's when they start to cut you off. If you can't see the President you might as well forget it."

Opponents of the energy scheme support his contention that he leaned over backwards to make sure Mr. Ford got a full range of comments on the plan. The Vice President pushed hard, an official said, but he never tried to "obviate the process."

The independent agency the plan envisions would be charged with achieving "energy independence" in a decade by stimulating investment in nuclear energy and synthetic fuels on a vast scale, through government loans and loan guarantees to private industry.

On its face, the proposal represents a departure for an Administration that has consistently decried large-scale

Government intervention—a point vainly argued by its critics inside the Administration, including Alan Greenspan of the Council of Economic Advisers and Treasury Secretary William E. Simon.

Only Mr. Rockefeller seems unawed by its scale; in his early drafts of the proposal the working figure was not \$100-billion but \$200-billion, according to an aide.

The Vice President was eager to point out the political significance of the plan. It showed, he said, that President Ford means to broaden his base, that he does not see his campaign as simply a contest with Ronald Reagan for right-wing votes.

"If he did," Mr. Rockefeller said, "he wouldn't have come out with this program."

Not one to get excited by doctrines, Mr. Rockefeller is prepared to argue that the proposal is both progressive and conservative. "But I'm sure," he added, without a flicker of regret, "that the Reagan people won't take it as a conservative thing."

Two hours before the President described the program to a labor meeting in California, the Vice President rode the short distance from the Executive Office Building to the other side of Lafayette Square to make a personal presentation of the address to George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. The courtesy was designed to underscore the theme that this latest energy scheme meant jobs.

What was said about the program, Mr. Rockefeller commented later, was less important than the fact that the President had "done it." Mr. Ford, he continued, was "now casting himself as a positive leader meeting emerging problems."

Whether the proposal will prove to be as significant politically for President Ford as

Mr. Rockefeller evidently hopes will depend, first of all, on its reception in Congress, and that is likely to be stormy. Its political significance for Mr. Rockefeller is more apparent; had the President accepted the arguments against the plan, the Vice President's hopes of playing an important policy role in the Administration would have been all but dashed.

Mr. Rockefeller, who sees the President privately at least once a week, says now that he was never worried that the proposal would be stillborn within the Administration because Mr. Ford, who is committed to the idea of "energy independence," had "initialled" the basic proposal last spring.

"He has a constituency of one, really," says Mr. Cannon, the Domestic Council director.

That may be a political fact of life, but there are those who find the Vice President's efforts to demonstrate his perfect loyalty to Mr. Ford overdone.

"I know he's intent on begin chosen again, but it's a little too much Uriah Heapish," a conservative Senator commented. "A big man like Rockefeller doesn't have to do that. He just lessens the regard folks here have for him."

Like Governor's Schedule

It remains to be seen whether the energy scheme will prove to be a pattern for future Rockefeller initiatives, or whether it will stand as his major policy-making effort. He has collected study groups and task forces all his political life and now, under the aegis of the Domestic Council, has several of them working up proposals on income-maintenance legislation, regulatory reform and Federal-state relations for possible inclusion in the President's State of the Union message in January. In addition, one of his aides, Richard D. Parsons, has drafted a white paper on drug enforcement.

These studies—along with the work of various Federal commissions he oversees—keep Mr. Rockefeller on a schedule that is about as full as the one he had in his 15 years as Governor.

But not even President Ford's endorsement of a \$920,000 appropriation request to double the staff of the Domestic Council is enough to institutionalize a policy-making role in the office of the Vice President.

Mr. Rockefeller turns back all questions about his attitude to his job by saying he is "totally relaxed." It is a phrase he has found useful since the day Mr. Ford invited him to Washington. But it is essentially defensive. Relentlessly upbeat as he remains in public, he never says he finds the job challenging or exciting. But, then, even his most lackluster predecessors never said that.

On the rare occasions that he communicates frustration to his staff, an aide said, it is in gestures—a wave of his hand or wrinkling of his brow that seems to say, "what can you do?" But the feeling is submerged as quickly as it surfaces.

Inevitably, his age is a factor in any discussion of his political future. Except at the temples,

where it is gray, his hair is obviously tinted in shades of amber and now and then change noticeably. His stamina shows no sign of ebbing, but harsh lights are not always kind to him; on television and in press photographs, he often ends up looking older than he does in personal encounters.

After saying for a third time in the interview that he was "totally relaxed," the Vice President allowed himself a meaningful pause, then threw in an apparent non sequitur. "Happy and the children haven't moved down here," he noted.

The fact that Mrs. Rockefeller and their two young sons still make their main residence at 812 Fifth Avenue in New York is generally not stressed by Rockefeller spokesmen, especially this month when he has spent more than \$50,000 on housewarming parties for his new official residence here. The Vice President wanted to make the point that he could leave Washington easily, if that served the President's purpose.

But there is no reason to imagine that he would leave by choice. "He's in the game now," said an aide, stating the obvious. "If he leaves, he'd be out of the game."