



Ford Running Hard

Joseph Kraft

PRESIDENT FORD is now running like crazy. But not for election to the presidency — or at least not yet. He's running for the Republican nomination and the results of the appeal he is making for right-wing support are showing up in new and not very enlightened stands on crucial matters such as tax policy.

Less than a month ago the White House was full of confidence that the President held the Republican nomination in the palm of his hand. Mr. Ford himself told visitors that he has enlisted as his supporters for 1976 most of the California financial heavy hitters who used to back his most likely opponent, the conservative former governor of California Ronald Reagan.

★ ★ ★

THE COCKINIENESS was shaken by a combination of events. The Democratic Congress suddenly came alive and began overturning Ford vetoes on social issues. Polls of all kinds showed Mr. Ford's popularity slipping steadily — often below the 50 per cent mark.

In a special Senate election in New Hampshire, a relatively little-known Democrat, John Durkin, beat a strong Republican, Louis Wyman, whom the President had strongly endorsed. Signs were there was no

Ford organization in New Hampshire, the first presidential primary state. There were clearer signs that Reagan did have an organization.

Another blatant bid for conservative support was the \$27 billion tax cut Mr. Ford proposed last week. The new program has no chance of being passed.

But as rhetoric for the Republican right the tax package was a doozer. It emphasized cuts in taxes and in government spending. It would provide a lowering of individual taxes for all persons without giving a special break, as the Democrats do, to poorer groups. It would cut government programs and give the savings to — of all people — business corporations.

★ ★ ★

PERHAPS the saddest feature of Mr. Ford's blatant bid for the right is that it will avail him so little. He cannot outdo Ronald Reagan with the conservatives. His stock-in-trade, both as candidate and President, is straightforward honesty.

But the other day both CBS and NBC refused his claim that the tax speech be carried as a non-partisan presidential address. Which only means that, as the President twists and turns, he is losing even his reputation for probity.