

Conservative Party To Support Reagan Over Ford for 1976

NYTimes OCT 21 1975

By FRANK LYNN

Conservative party leaders declared yesterday that they would support Ronald Reagan over President Ford for the Republican nomination and that if Mr. Ford was named they would oppose endorsement of him in the 1976 general election if Vice President Rockefeller was his running mate.

J. Daniel Mahoney, the Conservative state chairman, and Serphin R. Maltese, the party's executive director, said Conservatives would undoubtedly work for Mr. Reagan if he attempted to win New York Republican delegates in next April's Presidential primary here.

Mr. Maltese described the Conservative party as "a pre-existing organization" for Mr.

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Reagan. "We're tuned into every Republican in the state with conservative leanings," he said.

The outright public opposition to the Ford-Rockefeller ticket came as the Conservatives feted Mr. Reagan—who is expected to announce his candidacy next month—at their annual state dinner last night at the Americana Hotel here.

Mr. Reagan drew a standing ovation when he was introduced by Mr. Mahoney as "the next President of the United States."

The Conservative leaders' stance could upset the tenuous relations between New York Republican and Conservative leaders and possibly result in denial of the Republican designation to Senator James L. Buckley, who was elected as a Conservative six years ago but is seeking both the Conservative and Republican nomination next year.

The Republican state committee has endorsed President Ford but conspicuously deferred any action on Senator Buckley.

The Senator, who also spoke at the Conservative dinner, is considered a close ally of Mr. Reagan, though he has not taken a position on the Presidential nomination. He has, however, praised Mr. Reagan as a more effective Governor than Mr. Rockefeller was.

The political embarrassments of a new Conservative-Republican split in the state were pointed up by two other speakers at the Conservative dinner. They were the Republican legislative leaders—The State Senate majority leader, Warren M. Anderson; and the Assembly

minority leader, Perry B. Duryea.

Their presence at the dinner symbolized the closer ties between the two parties since Mr. Rockefeller left the New York scene.

Mr. Reagan did not mention his prospective candidacy in his speech to the 800 diners. But he clearly sounded like a challenger rather than a defender of the incumbent Republican Administration as he attacked "big government."

The Californian charged that, because of Federal spending programs, "by any standard applied to private business the United States is bankrupt."

He said the Federal Government was spending \$1-billion a day, consuming 37 per cent of the gross national product, and was paying interest on its debt amounting to \$1-billion every 10 days.

"Government is not the solution to the problem; government is the problem," Mr. Reagan said.

Explaining why he and other Conservative leaders preferred Mr. Reagan over Mr. Ford, Mr. Mahoney cited a mail survey of party contributors earlier this year in which Mr. Reagan was the preferred Presidential choice of 46 per cent, followed by Senator Barry Goldwater with 10 per cent. President Ford was the choice of fewer than 3 per cent of those surveyed, Mr. Mahoney said.

"If Reagan announces against Ford, we would like to be responsive to our constituency," Mr. Mahoney added.

Mr. Maltese predicted that Mr. Reagan would win early primaries next year in New Hampshire and other states and that President Ford, like President Lyndon B. Johnson in

1968, would not then seek his party's nomination.

Despite their preference for Mr. Reagan, both Conservative leaders indicated that the President, if he was the G.O.P. nominee, could win Conservative party endorsement in this state in the general election unless Mr. Rockefeller was his running mate.

"There's no enthusiasm for Ford," Mr. Mahoney said, "but the real problem for obvious historic reasons is Rockefeller."

The Conservative party was founded in 1962 as a counter to Mr. Rockefeller, who was then considered a liberal Republican.

One of the founders of the party, Kieran O'Doherty, who is Mr. Mahoney's brother-in-law, received a top Federal patronage post from President Ford last February when he was appointed a member of the Postal Rate Commission, a job that pays \$38,000 a year.

Mr. Reagan's speech at the \$50- and \$100-a-plate dinner was the first of two in the New York area this week. He is to speak tomorrow at the annual dinner of the Suffolk Republican organization, which is dominated by Mr. Duryea, a Rockefeller foe. He will also speak at a World Affairs Council luncheon in Philadelphia today and at Yale University this evening.

Both Republican and Conservative party leaders said there was no evidence of any budding Reagan organization in the state. But there were indications of latent support among Republicans, as well as the Conservatives. "Nobody is saying a word until they see whether Reagan runs," said a Republican county leader who had been counted as a Ford supporter.