

Ford May Let Convention

Pick His Veep

By David S. Broder
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Washington

President Ford may throw open the choice of his running-mate to the Republican convention, House minority leader John Rhodes of Arizona said yesterday.

Rhodes, who will be permanent chairman of next month's nominating convention in Kansas City, said after a meeting with Mr. Ford that it is "highly possible" the President will let the delegates choose his running mate if he wins the nomination.

Rhodes suggested that Central Intelligence Agency Director George Bush could rank with Ronald Reagan and John Connally as a favorite if the choice were left to the convention.

Rhodes disclosed the President's plan in an interview with editors and reporters of the Washington Post after he and Senate minority leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania had discussed the

vice presidency with Mr. Ford at the White House.

Rhodes said the President "has certainly not made up his mind" on a running mate, adding, "The list is large and growing."

"He may we leave it to the convention," the minority leader said.

If that happens, Rhodes said, both Reagan and Connally would be "very good possibilities" to win the support of the delegates.

Reagan, Mr. Ford's challenger for the presidential nomination, has said repeatedly there is "no way" he would accept the No. 2 spot, but a Ford-Reagan ticket has been urged by many GOP leaders as the ideal solution to the party's internal battle.

Connally, the former Texas governor and secretary of Treasury who ended his neutrality Tuesday and endorsed Mr. Ford for the nomination, has said he would accept the vice presidential nomination. He is a favorite of many southern and western delegates.

Senator Howard Baker of Tennessee, the convention keynoter, and several others were mentioned as possibilities by Rhodes, but the minority leader went out of his way

to praise Bush, the former Texas congressman who has filled a number of diplomatic and political assignments, including the chairman of the Republican National Committee.

"A convention which is free to choose could nominate George Bush," Rhodes said.

At the time Bush was nominated as director of CIA last December, objections were raised by several Senate Democrats to having a man with a political career in the intelligence post.

In order to gain Senate confirmation of Bush, Mr. Ford on December 18 wrote chairman John Stennis of the Senate Armed Services Committee a letter saying that "if Ambassador Bush is confirmed by the Senate as director of Central Intelligence, I will not consider him as my vice presidential running mate in 1976."

The President said Bush had "urged that I make this decision," adding, "This says something about the man, and about his desire to do this job for the nation."

Three days earlier, in testimony to the committee, Bush had said he would not "seek any office" but added that if the vice presidential nomination were offered him, "I cannot in all honesty tell you that I would not accept."

Rhodes said he thought a convention draft of Bush would not violate either Mr. Ford's or Bush's pledge.

Many Republicans have speculated that the convention would choose Reagan to run with Mr. Ford, if given a free choice, but Rhodes said that he believed "it was more likely two days ago than it is today (Wednesday)."

His comment reflected the generally negative reaction to Reagan's announcement Monday that he would pick Senator Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania as his running mate if he wins the presidential nomination.

As for Connally, who was indicted and later acquitted of

bribery charges in connection with milk processors' gifts to the Nixon campaign, Rhodes said he "has both pluses and minuses."

No presidential nominee has left the choice of his running mate to his party's delegates since Adlai Stevenson threw the Democratic nomination open at the 1956 convention. In that race Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee bested Senator John Kennedy of Massachusetts in a close battle.