

# A Glimpse Into The GOP's Future



**William Rusher**

**G**ERALD FORD'S confirmation as Vice President and Nelson Rockefeller's resignation as Governor of New York afford a useful opportunity to review how matters stand in the race for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination.

The Republican party is in deep disarray, and matters are likely to get worse before they start getting better, but a GOP victory in 1976 is by no means out of the question.

If Richard Nixon resigns or is impeached, and Gerald Ford succeeds to the presidency at any time within the next couple of years, the odds are almost prohibitively high that Ford will seek and receive the nomination to succeed himself.

Even if Mr. Nixon serves out his term, however, Ford is likely to be an important contender for the nomination.

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**B**UT IF 1976 finds Mr. Nixon still in the White House and Vice President Ford looking more and more like a royal but uninspiring Throttlebottom, the GOP may cast about for a more vigorous and colorful standard-bearer to run against the Democratic choice.

It is now widely recognized that Barry Goldwater's nomination in 1964 signaled the capture of the Republican Party from its longtime Eastern masters by a relatively conservative coalition of Westerners, Midwesterners and Southerners. This coalition has remained in control of the party ever since. It was conservatives,

therefore, who nominated Mr. Nixon in 1968 and renominated him four years later, and there is no reason to suppose that they will not have a comfortable majority of the delegates at the 1976 convention as well.

This fact of political life explains why Ronald Reagan is the early front-runner. It explains why the liberal Republican Senator from Illinois, Charles Percy, cannot seriously hope to win the nomination. It explains why Nelson Rockefeller, after a lifetime of aggressively liberal Republicanism, is inching rightward toward the party's center. It even explains why John Connally remains in Republican circles today, a sort of mysterious outsider: Who needs him?

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**C**ONSERVATIVES, pleased as they have every right to be with Reagan and his prospects, had better not take the Rockefeller threat too lightly. With Reagan on his right and Percy on his left, Rockefeller is well placed to gallop down the middle — a strategy that won the nomination for Dewey (over Taft and Stassen) in 1948 and for Mr. Nixon (over Reagan and Rockefeller) in 1968.

First, however, Rockefeller will have to take on Reagan early in 1976 and best him convincingly in some major primaries, and I do not envy him the assignment.

For the time being, barring Ford's accession, Ronald Reagan remains very much the Man to Beat.

**Arthur Hoppe is on a week's vacation**