

... Bringing the GOP Together

The nature and strength of Vice President Ford's party leadership were solidified in San Jose, Calif., April 20 when he ignored intense pressure and embraced embattled liberal Rep. Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey of California without sustaining the slightest damage.

While stopping short of endorsing maverick McCloskey's uphill battle for renomination in the June 4 primary, Ford left no doubt he is Pete McCloskey's pal. That infuriated the California Republican hard core who seem near an old dream: driving McCloskey from Congress. Nevertheless, the incident ended with McCloskey's prestige enhanced and Ford as strong as ever.

This reaffirms that Gerald Ford's ascendancy in the Republican Party today is such that he can offend the sacrosanct hard core with impunity. More important, his embrace of McCloskey reveals a Republicanism totally at odds with President Nixon's. Whereas the McCloskeys on the extreme Republican left lead Mr. Nixon's voluminous hate list, Ford truly wants to keep them in a broad-based party.

Actually, McCloskey's mercurial attacks on fellow-Republicans often are hard to take even for moderates. When Ford was proposing impeachment of Justice William Douglas, he felt McCloskey's sting. Nevertheless, in seeking good relations with all sorts of Republicans, Ford as House Minority Leader became McCloskey's friend.

Thus, last fall McCloskey was one of only four Republican congressmen (the other three were conservatives) whom Ford requested to testify at Senate confirmation hearings for Vice President. McCloskey responded with a ringing endorsement.

It soon became McCloskey who needed help. Obnoxious to hard-core Republicans ever since a win over

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Shirley Temple Black sent him to Congress in 1968, McCloskey became anathema with his aborted 1972 presidential race against Mr. Nixon. He now faces his toughest congressional challenge from multi-millionaire conservative Republican Gordon Knapp.

So, late last month, McCloskey took out full-page newspaper advertisements with this headline: "Republicans Like Gerald Ford Are Proud of Pete McCloskey."

Outraged conservatives mailed the ad to Ford and confidently asked him to repudiate both it and McCloskey. What they got was quite the opposite. "The wording in the advertisement was accurate," Ford wrote in reply. "... I am proud of my personal relationship with Pete McCloskey. He is a good friend of mine."

Encouraged, McCloskey asked to introduce Ford to the Republican State Convention in San Jose April 20 but was turned down flat by Republican State Chairman Gordon Luce. "If that happened," Luce told a friend, "I could never show my face around the party."

Undaunted, McCloskey next invited Ford to appear that same day at "a discussion of the future of the Republican Party" to be held at the Hyatt House Hotel down the street from the convention. Ford accepted, and McCloskey

sent out invitations in envelopes embossed with the vice presidential seal.

Not only the fanatically anti-McCloskey hard core but State Chairman Luce went into orbit. What one Ford lieutenant calls a "tremendous pressure campaign" sought Ford's cancellation. Protests poured into Ford political aide Gwen Anderson and the Republican National Committee. Even Sen. James Buckley of New York, scheduled to address the convention at the same time as the Ford-McCloskey seminar, complained that the Vice President was upstaging him.

Ford did not flinch, but did insist that conservative Rep. John Rousselot of California (a John Birch Society member, though a longtime McCloskey friend) appear at the seminar as originally scheduled. When congressional business called Rousselot back to Washington, Ford indicated he would not appear with McCloskey alone. Rousselot agreed to return to California.

In San Jose, Ford told an overflow crowd at the Hyatt House that the Republican "wide spectrum" has room for McCloskey and Rousselot. While he made no overt endorsement, the Palo Alto Times headlined: "Gerald Ford Boosts McCloskey Campaign." McCloskey was ecstatic. "Ford is the one guy who brings all us Republicans together," McCloskey told us.

Nobody at the state convention dared confront the Vice President. Although Luce had been firing back rockets to Washington accusing Ford of political blundering, he entertained the Vice President in his hotel suite without uttering a word of criticism.

The reason is explained by a conservative congressman with no love for McCloskey: "Nobody is about to knock Jerry Ford. He's all we've got." That spells boundless opportunity for the Vice President, in sharp contrast to Spiro T. Agnew and Richard M. Nixon, to embark on a mission of conciliation within the Republican Party.