



"Jerry, I think you're working too hard at the job. Maybe you'd better slow down a little."

Vice President Ford,
quoting President Nixon
on May 10



Can Gerald Ford Rescue the GOP?

By Marjorie Hunter
New York Times

Washington

For seven months now, Gerald Ford has been the Marco Polo of a troubled Republican party, an airborne circuit rider who has traveled more than 75,000 miles, visited 28 states and made 350 public appearances.

The Vice President has been cheered and booed. He has been mobbed and ignored. He has been swathed nearly nose deep in Hawaiian leis, topped with a shamrock hat by the Irish, and had plaques, keys to cities, fishing rods, golf bags and countless crystal, wooden and stuffed elephants bestowed on him.

He has reviewed troops, been briefed by admirals and generals, laid a wreath at Pearl Harbor, quoted the sayings of Chairman Mao to graduating classes, addressed the Louisiana Legislature, feted King Hussein of Jordan, trod dozens of bright red carpets to plunge into airport crowds and spoken at enough luncheon and dinner gatherings to give many a queasier mortal a chronic case of heartburn.

He has been Jerry Ford, attorney-at law, Jerry Ford, Navy officer, Jerry Ford, football hero, Jerry Ford, Boy Scout, Jerry Ford, politician, Jerry Ford, family man, sometimes all in the same day.

Why is he doing it? Is he understudying the President in order to take over the job if Nixon resigns or is removed from office? Is he running for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976?

These are questions being asked not only here in Washington, but across the nation as the Vice President moves restlessly from state to state, visiting Hawaii, 6000 miles from home, just last weekend.

Ford insists that neither of the above is his real motive.

"President Nixon is not going to resign," the Vice President has said repeatedly, at nearly every stop. "And I'm convinced that he will not be impeached, either."

As for the 1976 presidential nomination, Ford has said he is not a candidate, has no intention of being a candidate, and is not sure he would agree to run even if drafted — a situation he does not expect to occur.

Why, then, is he traveling so much, why is he speaking so often?

"I want to do everything I can to rescue the Republican party from the tragedy of Watergate," he said recently. "I think somebody has to get out and communicate and develop a rapport, not only politically, but with other groups."

He said he also found it difficult to say no, particularly to old friends in congress who are seeking reelection in this politically troubled year. "I am an easy touch when it comes to saying yes," he said.

Because he has said "yes" so often, he has been away from Washington probably three-quarters of the time since he became Vice President last December 6.

Two weeks ago, on one of those infrequent mornings in town, Nixon called him to the oval office at the White House.

As Ford later told it, the President "was concerned about the fact that I was working too hard at the job. He cautioned me to be a little less on the road and not work so hard on behalf of candidates of the party and

speaking to the public generally."

Some have interpreted the President's suggestion as an indication that he might feel he has been overshadowed by the man he chose as his Vice President. Ford disagrees.

"He was only a little concerned that the lack of sleep and long hours might be interfering with my health," the Vice President said last week. "I assured him I never felt better."

The Vice President has no intention of following the President's advice that he slow down.

"I would get very bored if I sat around and didn't get out to see the people," he said. "I know it's looked on by some as too broad a schedule, too much time on the road. But I enjoy it. I intend to continue it."

And continue it he has, filling up his date book as happily as a pretty young debutante during her coming-out season.

In the days and months ahead, his schedule will continue to be hectic.

Is he the only one in the administration who can go out and do these things, he was asked recently?

"I think I should be the last one to say that," he replied. "But, the President is pretty busy with foreign affairs and other matters, so, well, I think this is part of the responsibility I have."