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The Vice Presidency Guessing Game Starts

Washington

Potentially the most revealing and most important

decision of Gerald R. Ford's presidential debut — his choice of successor in the vice presidency — was a much-discussed mystery here yesterday.

Close friends continued to

feed speculation about more than a dozen possible candidates. But none of the friends claimed to have discussed the vice-presiden-

tial question with Ford or to be speaking for him on it.

A number of Ford associates thought he might hold off the decision for days or even weeks.

"Everybody's on tenterhooks up here," one senator remarked yesterday in a telephone interview. "But I think they're wasting their time. It's going to be a week or two. So far, I'd say he's a loner on this issue."

Former Representative Melvin R. Laird of Wisconsin, a Ford counselor for more than a decade, was quoted again yesterday as saying he believes that Nelson A. Rockefeller, the former New York governor, would be the best choice to reassure foreign nations, restore the Republican party and attract fresh talent to the depleted federal establishment.

Yet many other Republicans were observing that a Rockefeller vice presidency, as Laird pictures it, might overwhelm Ford and his staff. And Laird's open effort to broker the Rockefeller selection was the subject of wide second-guessing even among Rockefeller's staff.

"Laird could be throwing up a signal; he may have been expressing his personal choice," said one Republican politician, a close friend of Laird's and Ford's. He added that Laird himself is a "definite contender" for the vice presidency, "and he ought to be."

Rockefeller, on vacation at

Seal Harbor, Me., made no comment yesterday and, according to a spokesman, had heard "not a word from Mr. Ford or the President. He hasn't really talked to anyone," said Joseph Canzeri, a member of Rockefeller's personal staff. "I think the governor's concerned about the country. He's saddened by events, as all Americans are. It's a sad day."

Several other men were putting out word of their attractiveness and availability.

George Bush of Texas, the chairman of the Republican national committee met with Ford at mid-afternoon, a Bush spokesman announced, for "a private talk, looking to the future of the party and the country." Bush's friends believe he would have political appeal among the party faithful, particularly in the south and west.

An aide to Elliot L. Richardson of Massachusetts remarked that the former attorney general could bring as much brains and "class" as could Rockefeller to a Ford administration, while having the advantage of being a "team player" as compared to Rockefeller who has always been a star in his own right.

A spokesman for Barry Goldwater of Arizona observed that angry passions of the Goldwater-Rockefeller fight for the Republican presidential nomination in 1964 have virtually died in the intervening decade. Accordingly, the Arizona conservative would have no objection to a choice of the New York liberal. In turn, he suggested, the Rockefeller Republicans should have no objection to a choice of Goldwater, who declared Wednesday that he would accept the vice presidency if Ford offered it.

Other Republican names widely mentioned in the guessing were those of Senator Howard R. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois and Governor Ronald Reagan of California. But there was speculation, too, from the vice president's confidants that Ford might reach outside the ranks of active politicians — to the Supreme Court, for example, or to a retired Republican leader like William W. Scranton, the former governor of Pennsylvania.

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