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Platform On a Snowy Day

By Tom Wicker

STOWE, Vt., Jan. 1—The more enthusiastic skiers have gone to the slopes and the house is quiet. Against the green of the pines outside, snow swirls down endlessly, as if to interrupt the human din with a moment of serenity and blanket all things earthly in white.

The snowfall is appropriate for New Year's Day. Nothing, after all, is more romantic than a snow scene, and no day more openly encourages romanticism than the first of the year, when everything seems possible and change "not so wild a dream." That is especially so as 1976 begins—not only a new year, with the particular hopes each one brings to us all; not only the beginning of the nation's third century, in which men's faith in it as "the last, best hope of earth" may yet be justified; but also a year of national referendum in which Americans may at least face some of their more immediate problems.

So this is a good day to sit by a glowing fireplace, watch the snow coming down on the trees, the gray haze hanging on the mountains beyond, and ponder the year ahead, maybe even the century—for example, the program of My Favorite Unannounced Presidential Candidate.

He is a thoughtful man, though given to passions, long knowledgeable in politics, a bit skeptical of his fellow

IN THE NATION

humans as well as of himself. He "has the taste of it in his mouth a little" but is under no illusions about his chances to get elected President (which rank somewhere below Undecided in the Gallup Poll). He says he'd really like to run on a simple 3-point platform—not least because, in his view, the voters are so tired of being promised the moon, then finding the moon-landing either an anti-climax or a fraud, that they might welcome a candidate who said he could only make three promises and wasn't sure he could deliver on those.

His first promise would be based on the premise that with most of the Watergate offenders exposed and punished, and with the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. retrieved from the secrecy and autonomy in which they had inevitably become corrupt, at least two further steps are needed to clear the air of public life. My Favorite Unannounced Candidate would promise root-and-branch investigations, to the elimination of every legitimate doubt, of the circumstances under which Gerald Ford was named Vice President, became President, and pardoned Richard Nixon; and of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

These investigations, he believes, are necessary because so much doubt exists in the public mind in each case; and because, until those doubts are substantially laid to rest, lurid suspicions of cover-up, collusion, conspiracy, corruption—even treason—will continue to poison political life and limit confidence in the integrity of government. And it would be a necessary codicil to My Favorite Unannounced Candidate's pledge that the investigations would be conducted by independent staffs empowered to let the chips fall where they might.

He would promise, second, to put a firm and final end to "covert operations" abroad, by the C.I.A. or anyone else, even understanding as he does that not all of these have been assassination attempts, overthrown governments, bribed dictators and the like. Still, if more respectable "covert op-

erations," like financial support to labor unions or newspapers, have to go with the rest, or become public operations, My Favorite Unannounced Candidate says it would be worth it, for two main reasons. One is that covert operations force the Government to lie and cover up, and the habit becomes contagious, spreading into all other activities, and finally assumes a sort of patriotic legitimacy. The other is that covert operations undertaken in the "national interest" too often undermine what My Favorite Unannounced Candidate considers the true American interest—to encourage a world of diversity based as nearly as possible on national self-determination.

The third promise would be to undertake to provide the American people with full employment—not 4 or 6 or 7 percent unemployment—but a job for everyone willing and able to work, in private enterprise to the extent possible, in public employment to the extent necessary. This would not be offered as a panacea for all economic ills, but as a positive step to reduce poverty, welfare dependence and possibly street crime, accomplish certain public purposes (for example, the reconstruction of railroad lines), and hold down inflation by increasing both supply and demand.

On New Year's Day, 1976, that doesn't seem so much to promise—but it's probably more than anybody who can get elected can deliver. As My Favorite Unannounced Candidate might say, when the snow melts, you'll get slush.