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Ford Contrasts His Presidency With Nixon's

Switch Follows Primary Losses

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MEMPHIS, May 14—

Battered by five losses in the last six primaries, President Ford is now campaigning as much against the memory of Richard M. Nixon as he is against Ronald Reagan.

He has a new stump speech and a new slogan ("Peace, Prosperity and Trust"), an integral part of which is a reminder to voters of what the end of the Nixon administration was like.

Campaigning across Tennessee today, the President invoked those themes, which he first began using after his string of losses to Reagan in Texas, Alabama, Georgia and Indiana during the first four days of May.

In Johnson City this morning, Mr. Ford told 7,000 Republicans at a rally that two years ago there was "a crisis of confidence in our government, especially in the White House."

"The day I took the oath of office as President of the United States, I said that truth is the glue that holds government together," he said. "Twenty-one months later, the record of my administration is one of candor, integrity and openness. It is a record that has restored the people's confidence and trust in the White House."

"I want to finish the most important job that I have begun—the restoration of faith and trust in the presidency itself," he concluded.

Here in Memphis, where he dedicated a restored downtown shopping mall in a light drizzle, the President repeated the theme.

"The day I was sworn in, I said our long national nightmare is over, and it is," he said. "We have totally dispelled the climate of gloom and despair that hung over Washington."

Mr. Ford did not say so directly, but his message was unmistakable — the "nightmare" was Watergate and the "faith and trust" in the presidency he seeks to restore were lost under Nixon.

It is one of the ironies of the race for the Republican presidential nomination that the President, now at the lowest ebb this far in his campaign, should invoke the memory of Nixon in seeking

See PRESIDENT, A3, Col. 4

PRESIDENT, From A1

to reverse the momentum Reagan has gained with his string of primary victories.

Early in the campaign, there was an effort by Ford advisers to push any thought of Nixon into the background. Mr. Ford never mentioned his predecessor, or the circumstances under which he took office, unless asked about it.

Nixon's trip to China, on the eve of the New Hampshire primary, sent a shudder of misgiving through the White House and Ford campaign staffs because they feared it would remind voters of the Watergate scandal and Mr. Ford's controversial pardon of the former President.

In Houston late last month, the President acknowledged at a press conference that he deliberately had not been mentioning Nixon by name during his campaign appearances because the Watergate era is "best forgotten" by the American people.

That, however, was before the Texas primary, which marked the beginning of Reagan's surge in the GOP primary race. Looking for ways to reverse the alarming trend, Mr. Ford and his advisers came up with the new stump speech, in which Nixon still is not mentioned by name but in which the memory of his downfall is graphically evoked.

After weeks in which the President was on the defensive, answering Reagan's charges on foreign policy and military power, "we looked for the reasons this President should be elected," one White House aide said before today's trip. Those reasons clearly included the contrast between Mr. Ford's conduct of the presidency and Nixon's, he said.

The same aide added that the new theme "was not conceived as honest Jerry Ford versus Tricky Dick and it is not intended that way."

"The idea is to remind people of how bad it was in the summer of 1974 and how much better it is now, because there is a tendency for people to forget," another White House official said today in Memphis.

Nixon remains an uncomfortable subject to deal with for the candidates in the Republican primary race. In Kalamazoo, Mich., Thursday, for example, Reagan praised Nixon's conduct of foreign affairs. But when he and his aides realized that he had left open the possibility that Nixon might have a role in a Reagan administration, they were quick to correct that impression.

From here, Mr. Ford flew to Louisville, Ky., where he addressed an Armed Forces Day dinner and signed legislation that permits the President to draft up to 50,000 members of the military reserve into active duty for up to 90 days.

The Tennessee and Kentucky primaries are on May 25, and today's quick swing through the two states was merely a prelude to the main purpose of the trip—two days of campaigning in Michigan Saturday and Sunday before Tuesday's primary in the President's home state.

The importance of the Michigan primary, once considered locked up for Mr. Ford but now viewed as in doubt, was illustrated today in comments by Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) at the Johnson City airport.

Baker, vice chairman of the Senate watergate committee, who praised Mr. Ford for his "dignity and honor," predicted that the President will win the Tennessee primary "unless we take another look someplace else."

By that, Baker said, he meant a loss in Michigan. "That would be such a bump that it would make it very difficult to carry Tennessee," he said.