

## The big plus for McCloskey

The secret tape recording of White House conversations went out with the Watergate hearings, a belated rectitude that is likely to spare tender-eared future historians from encountering some unflattering descriptions of Gerald Ford. The vice president is now seen at the White House as the (expletive deleted) underminer of the President. He is referred to as the (barely audible) future president in the sanctity of the House cloakroom, where most of the Republicans have come to realize that the entire sorry Watergate episode will never be deleted from the political process as long as Richard Nixon remains President. As much as anything, it is this growing Republican perception of Ford as the true leader of his party in its time of troubles that has fueled the resentment of the Vice President at the White House.

Much of this resentment derives from Ford's insistence that the President should release additional information to the Watergate special prosecutor and to the House Judiciary Committee. Despite the Vice President's frequent statements that he believes Nixon innocent of impeachable offense, his equal insistence that the White House should comply with the committee's subpoenas undergirds the popular notion that Nixon is a devious man with much to be devious about.

But the resentment goes far beyond the transcripts. It partakes of envy at Ford's popularity but is more directly related to his insistence on independent scheduling and speech-making and upon his assumption of the political role that normally would be performed by a president. "No one is going to want Nixon to speak for him ever again," complained a Michigan Republican leader in the wake of the President's disastrous intervention in a special congressional election won by the Democratic candidate. "From now on, the man who everyone will want is Jerry Ford."

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No one wanted Ford any more than Republican Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey of California, the embattled California congressman who challenged Nixon for the presidency in 1972 and who has already declared himself in favor of Nixon's impeachment. McCloskey is the congressman whom the White House would like most to retire, though this derives less from any leftover personal vendetta than from a desire to make an example of him within the party. The White House is well aware that Democratic leaders in the House are unwilling to push through an impeachment resolution on partisan lines. A McCloskey defeat in his own primary, therefore, would serve as a signal to other Republicans that they still face political penalties for opposing the President.

Ford, though confronted with this argument, couldn't have cared less. As minority leader in the House, Ford has always placed a high priority on broadening the base of the party, and he realistically believes that the GOP is too small a minority to be able to afford defections from either ideological wing. When most other Republicans were saying good riddance, Ford pleaded with Republican Don Riegle of Michigan to remain a Republican instead of switching to the Democratic Party. When McCloskey asked Ford to give a boost to his campaign by appearing at a discussion on the GOP's future in San Jose April 20th

along with Republican John Rousselot of Pasadena and congressional candidate George Miliadis of Gilroy, the Vice President readily agreed.

Ford, under pressure from the state Republican Party, from prominent conservatives and from the White House, would not endorse McCloskey specifically. But he said he had no objections to McCloskey's better idea of making the appearance resemble an endorsement meeting. Some 60,000 invitations were sent out by the McCloskey reelection committee on a postcard mailer in which Ford's name appeared in the return-address space. Ford permitted scores of pictures with McCloskey, which are now the basis for an effective television commercial. And he said what McCloskey had hoped he would say, which is that "Pete contributes an input that is needed." "I urge you to embrace Republicans who are honest, diligent and hard working, whether they are on your side of the political spectrum or not," Ford continued. "The Republican Party needs this depth."

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Ford's appearance came despite a last-minute appeal from Senator James Buckley, the New York Republican-Conservative who was addressing the nearby state Republican convention at the same time.

*Human Events*, the right-wing weekly that has been closely attuned to intra-party attitudes, reported this dialogue between David Keene, Buckley's top political aide, and Warren Rustand, who has charge of Ford's scheduling: Keene asked Rustand whether Ford had cleared the appearance for McCloskey with the state party chairman or state committee. No, said Rustand. Had it been cleared with Governor Reagan? No, he said. Did the Vice President know there was a primary? Yes, came the response. "You must understand," Rustand told Keene, "the Vice President is a very independent person."

The effect of Ford's appearance on McCloskey's behalf was devastating in the estimate both of McCloskey's managers and of those in charge of the campaign of his opponent, Gordon Knapp. "It really depressed them and it gave us a needed lift," said Ron Smith, the McCloskey campaign manager. "It reassured people who didn't know McCloskey that he's not a crazy, irresponsible person, or the Vice President wouldn't be supporting him. It turned everything around." Said Knapp's campaign manager, Harvey Hukari: "It was a big plus for McCloskey because it made him seem to be a genuine Republican." Polls taken soon after the Ford appearance showed that McCloskey soared far ahead. He slipped back in May, as some momentum was regained by Knapp, a mineral-water company president who relied on his own shoe leather plus a compendium of previous McCloskey statements on abortion, amnesty, the death penalty and marijuana. McCloskey relied on his incumbency, his volunteers, his maverick record — and upon Gerald Ford. His next-to-last mailer, sent to every Republican voter in the district, was a reprint of the Palo Alto *Times* account of the Ford visit with the headline: "Gerald Ford Boosts McCloskey Campaign." Whatever the outcome, McCloskey owed a heavy debt of gratitude to the "very independent person" who is now the odds-on choice to become the next President of the United States.

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