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Vice President Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller and the Death of Liberal Republicanism

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Honors Studies in
Political Science

By

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A Speech at the Republican National Convention

On the final day of the Republican National Convention in 1976, Vice-President Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller was to give a speech nominating Senator Bob Dole, his replacement as President Gerald Ford's running mate. The speech was a mere formality, but as Rockefeller began to address the convention, he noticed that he could not be heard. As those nearby strained to hear him over the din of the crowd, he yelled into the microphone, implored a nearby technician to turn up the sound, and wrapped up his speech as fast as he could. As he left the stage, he warned the next speaker of the issues with the audio system, and he directed an assistant to make sure the problem was fixed before President Ford gave his acceptance speech later that evening. But as he did so, he noticed that the following speaker's voice could be heard perfectly.¹ While other participants in the events said that his audio had simply mysteriously gone dead in the middle of his speech, Rockefeller interpreted this event in a far more sinister light.² He concluded that his sound had deliberately been turned down to dampen earlier speeches and amplify the effect of the president's address, and the rage he felt at this indignity was only amplified when he was told that he would be escorting Bob Dole's mother to the stage following the end of Ford's speech. Threatening that he would leave the convention hall immediately if not allowed to go up following the president, he confronted Ford's chief of staff Dick Cheney. While Cheney quickly agreed to let him go up second, Rockefeller was not finished with him. He raged against the poor treatment he had been receiving, accused him of having turned down his microphone during the speech, and said he was finished with his duties as a Vice-President and a member of the Ford campaign.³ In response, Cheney "took [his] verbal

¹ Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Random House, 2014), 899-900.

² Dick Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 73.

³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 900.

pounding, assured the vice president of [his innocence], and go out of there as fast as [he] could.”⁴

While Rockefeller eventually walked back his decision to step away from the Ford campaign, infamously resulting in him giving a crowd of student protestors at one event a one-finger salute, he did not play a significant part in it. Despite being the Vice-President of the United States, he was relegated to a mere supporting role, barnstorming alone in a dozen states on behalf of Republican candidates.⁵ In short, he was given a muted microphone. For a man who once was at the cusp of the Republican nomination for president, who had commanded veneration and hatred in equal measure with his speeches, who had served nearly four full terms as the governor of one of America’s most populous states, New York, and who had even been made first-in-line to the presidency to fall so far raises the question of what exactly happened to him. In attempting to answer this question, there is no better episode to point to than the very one at whose culmination Rockefeller’s muted speech occurred: the 1976 Republican contest for the presidential nomination. Both the circumstances facing the Ford primary campaign as well as the decisions made to address them cemented the political death of Nelson Rockefeller and his brand of liberal republicanism. However, before the primaries may be fully addressed, one must begin by looking at the circumstances that brought Rockefeller to ascend to the Vice Presidency in the first place and also what made him an icon of liberal Republicanism. One must begin by looking at Watergate.

⁴ Cheney, *In My Time*, 73.

⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 902, 905.

“Our Long National Nightmare”

On August 8, 1974, President Richard Nixon announced his resignation in a live broadcast before an audience of 150 million Americans.⁶ The Watergate controversy that had gripped the public and the White House for the better part of a year had brought down the Nixon presidency. While Nixon had previously indicated that he had no intention of resigning even as the controversy peaked, believing himself not guilty of any impeachable offense and dedicated to settling the matter in the Senate, his political base had eroded out from under him.⁷ Even the stalwart Nixon defender Senator Barry Goldwater said “the best thing [Nixon] can do for the country is to get the hell out of the White House, and get out this afternoon.”⁸ This culminated in a meeting on August 7 between Nixon, Senator Goldwater, Senator Hugh Scott, and House Minority Leader John Rhodes in which Nixon was told in no uncertain terms that he would be removed from office if the Senate were to vote on the matter.⁹ So, the next day at nine o’clock, Nixon announced in a fifteen-minute speech that he “shall resign the Presidency, effective at noon tomorrow” and that “Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour.”¹⁰ For Vice President Gerald Ford, it would be quite a departure from his duties of just one year before.

For just one year before Nixon’s resignation, the Vice Presidency had been occupied by Spiro Agnew. While he had been on the national stage as a politician ever since his election to the Vice Presidency with Nixon in 1968, skeletons in his closet from his time as governor of Maryland came to rear their ugly skulls in the latter half of 1973. Federal prosecutors in

⁶ Donald Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held: Gerald Ford and the Rescue of the American Presidency* (New York: Free Press, 2018), 14.

⁷ Gerald R Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper & Row / Reader’s Digest:1979), 22.

⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 22.

⁹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 27.

¹⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 37.

Baltimore began to investigate allegations that he had received kickbacks from firms in exchange for the awarding of state contracts while governor. While Agnew said the allegations were “damned lies,” the situation continued to unravel around him. During the investigation, it was even uncovered that these transactions did not end after his ascension to the Vice-Presidency.¹¹ In a farcical situation more fitting for a comedic sketch than the behavior of one of the nation’s highest elected officials, Agnew took cash payouts in white envelopes across his desk while sitting in the Office of the Vice President of the United States in the Old Executive Office Building.¹² In a meeting with Ford, Nixon stated that he knew nothing of this, saying he would not have been on the ticket if he had known.¹³ Agnew had been a relatively unknown and untested figure when he was selected, resulting in his not being sufficiently vetted by the FBI, the media, or the Nixon political machine.¹⁴ As the truth was revealed, on October 10, 1973, Agnew decided to resign and plead no contest to a single charge of income tax evasion, escaping a wider prosecution by the government.¹⁵ Nixon then turned to finding a replacement for his former Vice President.

When Nixon searched for a replacement, his first choice was John Connally, a man those who were close to Nixon found he was “unusually enamored” with.¹⁶ However, he was the subject of an ethics investigation at the time, leading those around Nixon to convince him that Connally would be quite difficult to confirm.¹⁷ So, he was ruled out. Then, Nixon turned to Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan as potential candidates, but he was persuaded by his staff that either one would split the party ideologically.¹⁸ So, they, too, were ruled out. All this left

¹¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 101, 103.

¹² Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 48.

¹³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 103.

¹⁴ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 76.

¹⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 103.

¹⁶ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 23.

¹⁷ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 23; Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 107.

¹⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 107.

House Minority Leader Ford as the “safest’ choice,” a choice made even safer by Ford’s stated lack of ambition to hold office after January 1977.¹⁹ And in Nixon’s mind, he believed that Ford’s confirmation as Vice President would deter impeachment since “Congress would not dare to assume responsibility for replacing him with a man who had so little background in international affairs.”²⁰ Ford was thus elevated to the Vice Presidency. So, on that fateful day in August of 1974, Ford entered office without a national mandate, ascending to the Presidency only through the disgraceful resignations of his predecessors.

As Ford entered the Presidency, he was convinced that what the country needed was a time to heal, viewing the years of suspicion and scandal culminating in Nixon’s departure as demoralizing to the people.²¹ While just two years before in 1972 trust in government was at 53%, it had fallen by seventeen points to 36% by 1974.²² In the words of one advisor, it was Ford’s “most fervent hope in those early days to replace a national frown with a national smile.”²³ This effort began with his first address to the nation and the world following his taking of the oath of office in the East Room of the White House.²⁴ In his speech, he began by acknowledging the extraordinary circumstances that resulted in his assumption of the presidency before promising that this shall not be an inaugural address, a fireside chat, nor a campaign speech but rather “a little straight talk among friends.”²⁵ He said that although he neither sought nor had been elected to take on this extraordinary responsibility, he would not shirk it.²⁶ He

¹⁹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 105, 107.

²⁰ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 23.

²¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 124.

²² “Public Trust in Government: 1958-2023,” Pew Research Center, September 19, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/public-trust-in-government-1958-2023/>.

²³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 124.

²⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 124.

²⁵ Gerald R Ford, “Upon Being Sworn In as 38th President of the United States,” The East Room, Washington D.C. August 9, 1974, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0248/whpr19740809-001.pdf>, 1.

²⁶ Ford, “Upon Being Sworn In,” 1.

would be a president of all Americans.²⁷ He then emphasized the importance of truth, honesty, and candor before declaring, “My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over.”²⁸ In ending his speech, Ford reaffirmed his promise “to uphold the Constitution, to do what is right as God gives me to see the right, and to do the very best I can do for America.”²⁹ While this resolution and Ford’s desire for healing would soon lead to the decision to pardon Nixon, his attention turned to filling the office he had just left.³⁰ He began to search for his own Vice President.

²⁷ Ford, “Upon Being Sworn In,” 1.

²⁸ Ford, “Upon Being Sworn In,” 2.

²⁹ Ford, “Upon Being Sworn In,” 2.

³⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 161.

“The Closest I’m Ever Going to Get”

As President Ford assumed his duties, he was assisted by a secret transition team that had been meeting for months prior to Nixon’s resignation. This transition team, following Ford’s discovery of it just before his ascension to the presidency, may not have accomplished much, but it provided Ford a good start in conducting his presidential duties.³¹ For example, while they may not have formally drafted up a list of potential Vice Presidents, their conversations on the matter lead to serious discussion of several candidates, including Nelson Rockefeller.³² On the morning of August 7, Rockefeller was told that he was seriously being considered for Vice President by Mel Laird, an intimate of Ford and former Secretary of Defense. While Rockefeller dismissed this, saying he was being set up just to be shot down, he was told by a long-time assistant that he believed this one could be real.³³ In the coming days, Rockefeller would learn just how real this offer truly was.

When discussion opened regarding who would become the new Vice President, Ford sought the counsel of many. The first recommendation he received was from Nixon himself before his resignation. Nixon told Ford, “you’ll want somebody who will add stature to the Administration, somebody who will generate national as well as international confidence.”³⁴ And Nixon only named one candidate who could accomplish that, Nelson Rockefeller.³⁵ Another person counseling Ford was Bob Dole. Among the nine men Dole listed as potential candidates was Rockefeller.³⁶ Listed at second and tying with Barry Goldwater, Dole praised Rockefeller and Goldwater’s credentials, said they were considered good Republicans in the Midwest, and

³¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 24.

³² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 24; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 844.

³³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 844.

³⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 29.

³⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 29.

³⁶ Bob Dole, “Vice Presidential Recommendations,” August 13, 1974, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/25thamend/19740813_rectoford-dole.pdf, 1.

declared that either man would be wholly acceptable.³⁷ Although it did not directly recommend any candidates, Ford likely also consulted the criteria for a Vice President proposed in a memo by Donald Rumsfeld.³⁸ In it, Rumsfeld proposed two criteria to consider in the selection: their “personal behavior” being at the new high post-Watergate standard and how they might complement Ford “by virtue of a different background and appeal.”³⁹ While some may contest whether Rockefeller fulfilled this first criterion given his past “indiscretions,” he doubtless fulfilled the latter. With his appeal to organized labor, urban America, and other groups that were not natural elements in Ford’s constituency as well as his executive background contrasting to Ford’s congressional one, Rockefeller once again seemed a strong candidate.⁴⁰ Finally, Ford advisor Bryce Harlow was counseled. When considering who should be the candidate, Harlow considered their national stature, executive experience, and ability to broaden Ford’s political base before assigning them points and ranking them numerically. Ranking fifth on this list with thirty-five points was Rockefeller. Harlow said he was the best qualified, would bring a towering number two to the administration, would bring the numerous professional staffers he had cultivated to fill out the Administration, and broaden Ford’s political base. On the other hand, he said that his age, at sixty-six, would be a concern, that he would anger conservatives, and that he may not feel comfortable playing second fiddle to Ford. Despite these drawbacks and Rockefeller’s low ranking numerically, Harlow declared Rockefeller the best choice, winning praise from the media and signaling Ford’s independence.⁴¹

As Ford considered their advice, he still had one overwhelming criterion he was considering: “he had to be a man fully qualified to step into my shoes should something happen

³⁷ Dole, “Vice Presidential Recommendations,” 1.

³⁸ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 76.

³⁹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 76.

⁴⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 844-845.

⁴¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 142-143.

to me.”⁴² Ford, in considering this, only had three candidates in mind: George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, and Nelson Rockefeller.⁴³ He had the three men fill out extensive legal and financial forms as well as subjected each to FBI vetting in preparation for potentially choosing one of them.⁴⁴ Ford viewed Bush and Rumsfeld as the future of the party and Rockefeller as the establishment candidate. And among these three men, only Rockefeller needed no introduction to the world, a circumstance called for given Ford’s unique position.⁴⁵ In addition, the consequences of Nixon’s decision to elevate Agnew, an unknown whose skeletons were undetected, doubtless played on Ford’s mind when coming to his decision. While Ford knew that this would dismay conservatives, he had made up his mind.⁴⁶ So, on August 17, 1974, Ford called Nelson Rockefeller to offer him the Vice Presidency.⁴⁷ But even as Ford had made up asking Rockefeller to be the Vice President, the question remained of whether Rockefeller would accept.

This was not the first time that Rockefeller had been offered the Vice Presidency. In 1960, as part of the so-called Treaty of Fifth Avenue negotiations, Nixon had offered Rockefeller the Vice Presidency. Citing campaign polling data that showed Rockefeller’s inclusion added two points, he tried to convince him to join the Republican ticket, even offering Rockefeller control of foreign policy and New York State patronage in the event of their victory.⁴⁸ Despite this offer, Rockefeller turned him down, remarking he was not “designed to be standby equipment.”⁴⁹ Another offer came in 1968 with both Humphrey allies as well as Hubert Humphrey himself reaching out to him to be Humphrey’s running mate on the Democratic ticket.

⁴² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 142.

⁴³ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 76.

⁴⁴ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 76.

⁴⁵ Cheney, *In My Time*, 51.

⁴⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 142.

⁴⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 142.

⁴⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 449-450.

⁴⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 450.

While he denied the offer, citing his age and lifelong loyalty to the Republican Party, the lingering contempt for the position he had previously expressed to Nixon doubtless factored into his thinking.⁵⁰ But as the years progressed, it seemed that a change had occurred in Rockefeller's thinking. When Agnew's resignation became a matter of when rather than if, Rockefeller, while not actively campaigning for the job to avoid public embarrassment in the event he was not selected, did not discourage the Republican governors or Nixon campaign contributors who lobbied for him.⁵¹ While Rockefeller was ultimately not selected to replace Agnew, this does speak to a shift in Rockefeller's thinking toward the Vice Presidency. No longer was it dismissed out of hand. All Ford had to do, it seemed, was make the right offer.

During their telephone conversation on August 17, Ford told Rockefeller that he was leaning toward nominating him to be Vice President and was wondering if he would accept. Rockefeller replied by saying he would need to talk to his wife and family and would then call the President back with a reply.⁵² The next day, Rockefeller said he would accept the position, and Ford made the offer definite the next evening, saying "Nelson, I've looked over all the possibilities, and I'm convinced you're the man who can best do the job as Vice President."⁵³ Rockefeller accepted the position, later saying that his refusal would have severely undercut the struggling President.⁵⁴ But he still did not accept Ford's offer without extracting some serious concessions. Instead of merely presiding over the Senate and traveling all over the world, Rockefeller would participate in all meetings of the Cabinet and the National Security Council, head the Domestic Council, and help put together Ford's domestic legislative package.⁵⁵ With these concessions, Rockefeller seemed positioned to be far from simple standby equipment. Still,

⁵⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 705-706.

⁵¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 833.

⁵² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 144-145.

⁵³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 145.

⁵⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 846.

⁵⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 145.

there were those who harbored doubts. Dick Durban, a New York state budget official Rockefeller would take with him to the White House, argued against taking the job for which he was so “temperamentally ill-suited.” After twenty minutes of making his case and having Rockefeller concede his points, Rockefeller still dismissed them, saying, “But Dick, this is the closest I’m ever going to get.”⁵⁶ So, Rockefeller traveled to Washington in anticipation of the announcement of his nomination by Ford, in anticipation of getting the closest he would ever get.

On August 20, 1974, President Ford formally announced his nomination of Nelson Rockefeller for the Vice Presidency. In his speech on the occasion, he emphasized his experience in government, highlighting his work for Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower as well as his fifteen years as governor of New York. He also made sure to highlight Rockefeller’s renown domestically and internationally before remarking on the long, deliberate nature of the process he went through to arrive at Rockefeller.⁵⁷ In this speech, Ford emphasized the qualities that made him select Rockefeller: his experience in governing that qualified him for the Presidency should anything happen to Ford and his status as a known element. Ford then ended his speech and ceded the stage to Rockefeller. In Rockefeller’s short speech, he emphasized the extraordinary circumstances the nation was experiencing, the need for all Americans to unite to advance the common national interest, and his optimism for the long-term future under Ford’s, and soon his own, leadership.⁵⁸ After his speech’s conclusion, Rockefeller then held a conference to answer questions from the media.

⁵⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 846.

⁵⁷ Gerald Ford, “Remarks of the President Upon His Announcing Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President-Designate,” The Oval Office, Washington D.C. August 20, 1974, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0248/whpr19740820-020.pdf>, 1-2.

⁵⁸ Rockefeller, Nelson A. “Remarks Upon Vice Presidential Designation.” The Oval Office, Washington D.C. August 20, 1974. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0248/whpr19740820-015.pdf>.

During this press conference, Rockefeller made sure to answer questions in a way that did not jeopardize his confirmation. So, when asked by the media if there was any understanding regarding what he would do specifically as Vice President, he dodged the question.⁵⁹ Instead of discussing the incredible role he had been promised in formulating domestic policy, he said that he had nothing in detail regarding what he would do and that the President would use him however he wanted.⁶⁰ While this was accepted by the press, he faced far more scrutiny regarding his finances. When asked what he would do regarding his financial assets, he merely said that he would conform to the law, only saying they would be put into a trust when pressed on the matter.⁶¹ This reluctance to discuss his finances was especially evident when asked about his current net worth. He responded, “You are not a Member of Congress,” refusing to even give the media an estimate.⁶² While he was pressed regarding the contrast between his praise of Ford’s openness and his own lack of openness, he still refused to discuss the matter, claiming that his understandings of protocol were that one did not discuss matters that were to be taken up by a committee before the hearings.⁶³ Questions regarding his finances would soon come to haunt his confirmation hearing, but, for the time being, he ended the press conference by saying that he did not take for granted that he would be confirmed.⁶⁴ In the coming days, he would learn how right he was not to take his confirmation for granted.

The press reaction to Rockefeller’s nomination was overall quite positive. *The New York Times* called his nomination “responsible and encouraging,” representing “new evidence by a

⁵⁹ Gerald R Ford and Nelson A. Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” The Briefing Room, Washington D.C, August 20, 1974, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0248/whpr19740820-021.pdf>, 2.

⁶⁰ Ford and Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” 2.

⁶¹ Ford and Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” 2.

⁶² Ford and Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” 3-4.

⁶³ Ford and Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” 5.

⁶⁴ Ford and Rockefeller, “Remarks of the President and Press Conference of Vice President- Designate,” 5.

conservative President of his receptivity to diverse viewpoints.” Rockefeller was called a hard, effective worker who has “strengthened [Ford’s] Administration and the country’s confidence in his own capacity for disinterested leadership.”⁶⁵ *Newsweek*, meanwhile, said it added a high style to Ford’s presidency.⁶⁶ But while the media praised the selection, the conservative outrage over Ford’s selection of Rockefeller was as swift as it was expected.⁶⁷ At the grassroots level, right to life activists picketed Rockefeller during a visit to the Senate Office Building, expressing their dissatisfaction with Rockefeller for his pro-choice actions while governor of New York.⁶⁸ In addition, Senator Bill Brock of Tennessee reported calls to his office were fifty to one against Rockefeller.⁶⁹ As activists marched and called, Republican politicians expressed their displeasure. Senator Marlow Cook of Kentucky, amidst a tight reelection battle, asked if there were “Any way we can get Nixon back?”⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina organized a group of congressional conservatives who vowed to fight the nomination.⁷¹ Of all the critics of this move, Senator Barry Goldwater was the most forceful. Already infuriated over Rockefeller’s attempt to meet him in his office with television cameras in tow on the day of his nomination, Goldwater told White House operatives that “You can kiss the Republican Party goodbye forever.”⁷² When explaining why he was so outraged, he pointed towards Rockefeller’s presidential campaign history, saying that “He left the party three times and now gets the cream and sugar.”⁷³ Thus, while Rockefeller’s entire history sparked opposition, it was his three

⁶⁵ “The Rockefeller Choice,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/21/archives/the-rockefeller-choice.html>.

⁶⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 848.

⁶⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 848.

⁶⁸ Richard T. Burness, “Confirmation of Governor Rockefeller,” August 21, 1974, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/25thamend/19740821_memorockyconfinfo.pdf, 2; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 735, 810.

⁶⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 848.

⁷⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 848.

⁷¹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 82.

⁷² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 847.

⁷³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 847-848.

presidential campaigns that truly enflamed hatred of him. And to explain how they did, it is necessary to examine each individually, for all three campaigns had incidents that built up the image of Rockefeller as the enemy.

“The Munich of the Republican Party”

To quote a Rockefeller aide when discussing the folly of his first presidential campaign, “Nelson’s mistake in 1960 was not in getting out but in getting back in.”⁷⁴ After a long period of traveling the country, looking at polls, and gauging interest in a primary fight against Vice President Nixon, Rockefeller initially renounced running for the presidency on December 26, 1959, saying it was a fight to which “the great majority of those who will control the Republican convention stand opposed.”⁷⁵ This is not to say Rockefeller had not seriously considered entering the race. While he may not have expected to emerge victorious, he wanted to record the inadequacies of American foreign and defense policy.⁷⁶ Despite this, he decided to withdraw. Rockefeller’s long-time political operative George Hinman argued this decision was based on the hopeless nature of the fight before them, saying, “The party was locked up and Nelson was locked out.”⁷⁷ Rockefeller blamed the lack of consensus and capacity among his advisors, saying that his chief political operatives “came to me and said, look, we can’t handle this, we’re quitting.”⁷⁸ It may also be attributed to Rockefeller’s feeling of political insecurity. He confessed before his death, “when I became insecure because of events getting out of control and beyond my capacity I always pulled back to a base which was controllable.”⁷⁹ Regardless of the precise reason why, other concerns trumped Rockefeller’s desire to make a statement. At least, they did until Rockefeller made his mistake in mid-1960.

On June 8, 1960, Rockefeller released a statement lampooning the Republican Party, President Eisenhower, and Vice President Nixon. Rockefeller said his party had an obligation to

⁷⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 418.

⁷⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 413.

⁷⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 415.

⁷⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 415.

⁷⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 415.

⁷⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 416.

raise the nation's sights and its standard of living, but he "[could not] pretend the Republican Party has fully met this duty."⁸⁰ Rockefeller attacked Nixon for not spelling out his program before the convention, saying that they could not "march to meet the future with a banner aloft whose emblem is a question mark."⁸¹ Asserting that "our position in the world is dramatically weaker today than fifteen years ago," an assertion sure to offend Eisenhower, Rockefeller called for a \$3 billion increase in defense spending, \$500 million for civil defense, and a total reorganization of the military.⁸² Rockefeller also called for the enforcement of the Supreme Court's school desegregation with all deliberate speed, not letting this deliberateness amount to sabotage by perpetually delaying integration. Finally, Rockefeller called for more aggressive funding of school construction, providing special educational assistance to needy areas, and financing of medical care for the elderly through the existing Social Security system instead of through the subsidies proposed by the White House. In all these areas, Rockefeller implied Nixon had failed display the forceful, energetic leadership needed, a criticism that would also be levied against him from Senator Jack Kennedy's campaign later that year.⁸³ Leadership, Rockefeller declared, "does not lie along the top of a fence" but instead "climbs heights" and "speaks truths."⁸⁴ Rockefeller saw Nixon sitting and straddling a fence on the issues, and Rockefeller decided that he would climb heights and speak truths regarding how to resolve them. This twenty-seven-hundred-word broadside was as unexpected as it was stunning. Both supporters and opponents of Rockefeller and his position struggled to defend this statement. This sentiment is best expressed through *New York Journal-American's* Fletcher Knebel's contention

⁸⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 443.

⁸¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 443.

⁸² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 443.

⁸³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 443-444.

⁸⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 444.

that GOP should henceforth stand for Grand Old Patricide.⁸⁵ Rockefeller soon began to make maneuvers in the race he had sworn off just months before.

Due to Rockefeller's late entry into the race, there were no primaries left to compete in. So, Rockefeller had to rely upon a draft campaign. Rockefeller and his campaign attempted to convince Republican delegates that Nixon could not win in November but that Rockefeller could, utilizing Rockefeller-financed surveys showing Nixon losing to Kennedy in five of the nation's largest swing states. This effort soon fell upon the rocks of reality, and by early July Rockefeller realized there would never be a draft.⁸⁶ It was simply too late. So, he turned to gaining control of the platform committee to bend the Republican platform in his own design. But just as the draft campaign did not go his way, neither was the platform campaign. There was no evidence it was moving his way as the week progressed. So, in a seeming last ditch effort to exert influence upon the Republican platform, he threatened a floor fight over the platform on July 22, wanting to force change in line with his urges for stronger civil rights and national defense language. In a reversal of his earlier failed efforts, this threat managed to gain the attention of Nixon, resulting in the so-called Treaty of Fifth Avenue that night.⁸⁷

During the meeting between Nixon and Rockefeller, Rockefeller made Nixon make several concessions, particularly on the issues of civil rights and national security. On the former issue, Rockefeller pushed for a strong civil right plank, including explicit language praising sit-in demonstrations by youth demonstrators in the South.⁸⁸ On the latter issue, Rockefeller pushed for preparedness, making the plank declare, "There must be no ceiling on American security," implying that Eisenhower's pursuit of a balanced budget had neglected the Soviet threat through

⁸⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 444.

⁸⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 446-447.

⁸⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 447-448, 451.

⁸⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 450.

its stifling of military spending.⁸⁹ While Rockefeller did make concessions to Nixon in return, settling for imprecise language on the rate of economic growth achieved through tax cuts and other economic stimuli, vagueness on how to best fund health care for elderly Americans, and dropping the specific figure which defense spending should increase by, Rockefeller doubtless won the encounter.⁹⁰ In the gloating words of one Rockefeller aide, “We are sitting here with a pair of 3’s and acting like we had three aces.”⁹¹ After coming to an agreement on these points, they then called the platform committee chairman and created fourteen points of agreement.⁹² The platform issue was, it seemed, settled, and there would be no floor fight. Before dawn broke the next morning, the agreement had been announced to the press who instantly dubbed it “the Treaty of Fifth Avenue.”⁹³

While there were Republicans who praised the agreement, they were solidly in the minority.⁹⁴ The civil rights portion of the agreement was openly condemned by southern delegates due to its praise of civil rights demonstrations in the South as the defense plank was privately said to be unacceptable to the White House due to its implication that Eisenhower’s fiscal policies had hampered the military response to the Soviet threat. This anger resulted in five states refusing to contribute to the finance committee as well as discussion regarding nominating a conservative to challenge Nixon.⁹⁵ Their chosen champion for this crusade was Barry Goldwater, who had denounced the Treaty of Fifth Avenue as “‘the Munich of the Republican Party’ dictated by ‘a spokesman for the ultra-liberals.’”⁹⁶ These protests did result in modification of the platform. The civil rights platform would no longer mention the sit-ins, and

⁸⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 450-451.

⁹⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 445, 450.

⁹¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 450.

⁹² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 451.

⁹³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 451.

⁹⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 452.

⁹⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 451.

⁹⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 451.

the defense platform now said, “There *is* no price ceiling on America’s security.”⁹⁷ Despite these changes, the platform was still a victory for Rockefeller. He had succeeded in bending the Republican Party to his will, but this success came at a heavy cost. He had angered Eisenhower, made himself an enemy of the conservatives, and alienated his allies. And when Nixon lost the election that November by the narrowest of margins, Rockefeller soon was pointed to as the cause by *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Daily News*, arguing he did not do enough to ensure Nixon’s success in expectation of his own run for president in 1964.⁹⁸ And this perception of Rockefeller as a party wrecker only saw itself grow during his 1964 campaign.

⁹⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 454.

⁹⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 458.

“WE WANT BARRY!”

While it would be difficult to argue that Rockefeller’s first campaign was not doomed from the start, his second campaign did not begin with such a bleak outlook. Rockefeller in mid-1963 held a commanding a forty-three to twenty-six percent lead over Goldwater among Republican voters in one Gallup poll, speaking to a primary season that although not contested would likely end decisively in his favor. Then, on Saturday, May 4, 1963, Rockefeller married his second wife Happy Murphy. By the end of the month, the Gallup poll showed nearly a flip in the polls with Goldwater ahead at thirty-five points to Rockefeller’s thirty points. Rockefeller’s position was best dramatized by a cartoon in which Rockefeller sits in a doctor’s office, explaining that he keeps hearing bells that first peal and then toll.⁹⁹ Rockefeller may have married the woman he wanted to marry, but it seriously damaged his presidential prospects. Divorce was still quite taboo, and many Americans cringed at this display of “immorality.” Connecticut senator Prescott Bush summarized the outrage when he asked an audience of graduating prep school children, “Have we come to the point in our life as a nation where the governor of a great state can desert a good wife, mother of his grown children, divorce her, then persuade a young mother of youngsters to abandon her husband and children and marry the governor?”¹⁰⁰ In the words of *National Review* publisher William Rusher, Rockefeller had done the impossible, “[turning] motherhood into a liability.”¹⁰¹ All this put Rockefeller in a position from which it would be difficult to recover. Despite this, Rockefeller pressed on, encountering even more difficulty as he did so.

⁹⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 533-535.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 534-535.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 534.

The difficulty in Rockefeller's recovery was only compounded following another declaration of conscience akin to the one from his first race. But while his first declaration was directed at the incumbent Republican leadership unable to address current issues, this address was squarely leveled at the emerging right-wing leadership of the Republican Party. For during the Republican National Committee meeting in Denver on June 22, 1963, the new Republican Colorado state chairman echoed calls for state's rights as he talked openly of "n*****" and "n***** lovers."¹⁰² Then, just one week later, a two-day meeting of Young Republicans in San Francisco emerged with a victory by two points of insurgent candidate Donald Lukens, a Capitol Hill staff member who called for abolition of the income tax and "free right of association," code for opposition to federally mandated desegregation.¹⁰³ Horrified by the conduct of these conventions and angered by his conviction that conservatives were "picking on me for marrying Happy," Rockefeller in mid-July 1963 practically declared war on this new right.¹⁰⁴ In this new declaration of conscience, he warned that "the Republican Party is in real danger of subversion by a radical, well-financed and highly disciplined minority."¹⁰⁵ He warned that these extremists, using totalitarian tactics, were attempting to seize the Republican Party, turn it towards their own designs, and "erect political power on the outlawed and immoral base of segregation."¹⁰⁶ Finishing his statement, Rockefeller declared that "political success cannot be divorced from political morality."¹⁰⁷ Through this statement, he had put himself firmly on the liberal side of the argument when it came to civil rights and their expansion, putting himself in opposition to the conservatives who would preach states' rights and freedom of association and were increasingly joining the party. While this call to arms quite expectedly alienated the conservatives, it did not

¹⁰² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 536-537.

¹⁰³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 537.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 539.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 539.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 540.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 540.

generate the enthusiasm from moderates Rockefeller had expected due to his earlier alienation of them in 1960 and the poor forecasts for his campaign, causing the statement to only further damage Rockefeller's efforts.¹⁰⁸ While once Rockefeller had been a clear frontrunner, his divorce and declaration of war had put him on the backfoot.

Despite this disadvantage, Rockefeller was able to remain a contender in the race, nearly matching Goldwater in New Hampshire and beginning to come back with a surprise victory in Oregon. Everything seemed to come down to how California went. Starting off in January 1964 with Goldwater leading among California Republicans fifty-eight percent to Rockefeller's twenty-seven, the campaign had a go-for-broke strategy. Intending to stir up the more than two-thirds of California Republicans who classified themselves to pollsters as moderates or liberals against Goldwater, the Rockefeller campaign planned to attack, attack, attack.¹⁰⁹ The campaign printed literature painting him as a loner in the party in contrast to Rockefeller and his moderate brethren. Rockefeller gave speeches calling Goldwater's foreign policy extreme and preposterous, citing his proposal to withdraw from the United Nations should Red China be admitted and his vow to send U.S. Marines into Cuba to turn on water supplies to Guantanamo Bay should Fidel Castro turn them off. However, the most extreme effort by the campaign was its hiring of picketers to carry swastika-bearing placards proclaiming, "Goldwater: The Fascist Gun in the West," at Goldwater appearances.¹¹⁰ These efforts, in conjunction with Eisenhower's seeming condemnation of Goldwater in a personal statement and Goldwater's own proposal to use "low-yield atomic weapons" to defoliate Laos, seemed to give Rockefeller a chance.¹¹¹ But as the primary day approached, the campaign found itself contending with the two issues that had

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 540.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 558, 574-576.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 554-555, 577, 579.

¹¹¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 581.

brought Rockefeller to such difficulty earlier in the campaign: his crusade against right-wing extremism and his marriage to Happy.

The Extremists was a campaign film intended to expose the danger posed by right-wing zealots through testimonials from the victims of their methods. While it was to debut May 28, just hours before its scheduled airing the Rockefeller campaign pulled the film, fearing the negative effect it may have upon the campaign. Soon, other negative spots were also pulled from the air. Meanwhile, on May 30, Happy gave birth to a baby boy after labor was induced, making headlines across the country. Voters went to the polls with Goldwater ads having barraged them over the weekend and a reminder of Rockefeller's divorce dominating the headlines. In addition, tens of thousands of volunteers for the Goldwater campaign rang doorbells in six southern counties, netting their candidate votes there that overcame Rockefeller's advantage elsewhere. Goldwater won the state with 51.3 percent of the vote to Rockefeller's 48.7 percent.¹¹² While this loss effectively ended the Rockefeller campaign, it was still not the end of Rockefeller's fight that year.

In the lead-up to the Republican National Convention that July, Rockefeller had become determined to make a stand against the direction his party was going.¹¹³ As he turned his campaign organization over to Pennsylvania governor William Scranton, he and others like him united in opposition to Goldwater sought to provoke any incident that may reverse the momentum of the convention and prevent his nomination. They questioned the credentials of any delegate selected through racially discriminatory practices. This effort was crushed on a voice vote, so they proposed three planks that took issue with the platform as it stood. They affirmed the constitutionality of the new civil rights law, denounced political extremism, and reasserted

¹¹² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 583-586.

¹¹³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, Prologue, pg. 5.

that only the president could authorize the use of nuclear weapons. Their efforts, however, were for naught, leading to the adoption of a firmly conservative platform. Despite this, Rockefeller was not deterred, ascending to the stage to take his stand against extremism.¹¹⁴ He was greeted with nearly a minute and a half of jeers, boos, and shouts of “We want Barry!”¹¹⁵ Throughout his speech, these interruptions would persist, causing him to have to pause his speech several times.¹¹⁶ During his speech, he called for the party to “repudiate, here and now, ... any doctrinaire militant minority whether Communist, Ku Klux Klan, or Bircher,” reminding the audience of his warnings of the previous year regarding the threat by groups like the rabidly anticommunist John Birch Society.¹¹⁷ He called these forces “wholly alien to the sound and honest conservatism” and “the sound and honest Republican liberalism” that had defined the party.¹¹⁸ Finally, he warned that the extremist threat was a danger to the party and the nation before detailing the personal intimidations he had suffered at their hands.¹¹⁹ As Rockefeller stepped down that night, he may not have walked away with a defeat of Goldwater, but if he intended to make a stand against extremism, he certainly accomplished his goal.

When November came and Goldwater lost, Rockefeller found himself once again blamed for the loss of his party. Rockefeller himself somewhat invited this blame, refusing to say who he would vote for president and only appearing with Goldwater during the campaign for a single brief rally.¹²⁰ Nixon himself pointed the finger at Rockefeller, accusing him of being a “spoilsport,” arguing he should have supported Goldwater. Further, he said that if one does not

¹¹⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, Prologue, pg. 8-10, 20.

¹¹⁵ Nelson A Rockefeller, “1964 Republican National Convention,” Republican National Convention, California, July 14, 1964, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c3807346/user-clip-governor-nelson-rockefeller-addresses-64-convention>, 0-1:50.

¹¹⁶ Rockefeller, “1964 Republican National Convention,” 1:50-8.

¹¹⁷ Rockefeller, “1964 Republican National Convention,” 3-4:30.

¹¹⁸ Rockefeller, “1964 Republican National Convention,” 4:45-5:15.

¹¹⁹ Rockefeller, “1964 Republican National Convention,” 6:20-7:50.

¹²⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 591-592.

contribute in a tough battle, “you cannot lead in the next battle.”¹²¹ Thus, the perception of him as a party wrecker became solidified as he made himself a sworn enemy of the ascendent forces on the American right.

¹²¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 595.

“Have you ever been to a Republican National Convention?”

Amidst the Rockefeller campaign to win the Republican nomination in 1968, Rockefeller gave a speech in which he discussed the criticism of his previous efforts, saying, “In 1960 they say I dropped out too soon. In 1964 they said I stayed in too long.” However, Rockefeller assured his audience that these mistakes would not be repeated this campaign since “this year, I’ve done both.”¹²² While this line may have been meant as a jest toward his critics, it does accurately reflect the follies of Rockefeller’s campaign in 1968, combining the mistakes of his previous campaigns into one almost farcical entry. After a long period of indecision and speculation regarding his candidacy, Rockefeller forcefully stated that he was not a candidate campaigning directly or indirectly for the presidency on March 21, 1968, mirroring his renouncing the presidency in December 1959.¹²³ But then, less than one month later, he gave a speech in which he argued for the need to address the urban crisis through the raising of \$150 billion “through the imaginative and responsible use of credit” (implying Democratic use of credit has been unimaginative and irresponsible) to rebuild America’s cities, echoing his declarations of conscience from the previous campaigns.¹²⁴ Rockefeller then re-entered the race on April 30, reflecting his late re-entry during his first campaign. In addition to the policy initiative regarding the urban crisis he had introduced before his candidacy became official, he proposed replacing four hundred categorical programs operated by the federal government with block grant programs operated by the states, “building bridges” with Communist China, and a one-year lottery in place of the current military draft. But having left too soon and re-entered too late to compete in the early, decisive primaries, Rockefeller found himself depending on polls

¹²² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 692.

¹²³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 676.

¹²⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 690.

showing him performing better versus Democratic frontrunners than the current Republican frontrunner Nixon, another repeat from his first campaign.¹²⁵

However, Rockefeller eventually came to change his strategy. Following the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy on June 6, Henry Kissinger urged Rockefeller to tap into the country's latent idealism and "[gain] such widespread popular support that the delegates have to reconsider their commitments."¹²⁶ Rockefeller thus returned to the campaign on June 11 speaking as an agent of change, offering himself as an heir to Kennedy to the young, the disaffected, and the marginalized. Positioning himself as a foe of the status quo, Rockefeller said that the United States must never again find itself "with a commitment looking for a justification" as it currently did in Vietnam, and he spoke against the men of Old Politics who "do not understand change,...do not comprehend the new realities of American life,...do not appreciate the significance of emerging forces. And who do not seem to care."¹²⁷ This speech brought his campaign a new fervor. Rockefeller visited the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles which still bore the scars of recent race-riots as well as African American enclaves in Cleveland, Wilmington, and Chicago's South Side, finding himself greeted by friendly crowds at them all. This effort to position himself as the heir to Kennedy brought him the support of former Kennedy supporters such as Martin Luther King Sr., the former head of the Congress of Racial Equality James Farmer, and the World War II icon who had grown disenchanted with U.S. policy in Vietnam Lieutenant General James Gavin.¹²⁸ The journalist-historian Teddy White, in describing the Rockefeller surge, said, "the hunger for a hero was the same...the same young people followed Rockefeller as had followed Kennedy in throngs as he travelled; the same heavy

¹²⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 691-693.

¹²⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 695.

¹²⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 696.

¹²⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 696-697.

admixture of Negroes who wanted a champion made his rallies come alive.”¹²⁹ Rockefeller, as he positioned himself as a figure of change, began to lambast Nixon as a figure of the past, somewhat mirroring his attacks on Nixon from his first campaign. When he spotted a hostile sign declaring, “Nixon’s the One,” Rockefeller responded, “That’s right, he’s the one. He’s the one who lost it for us in 1960.”¹³⁰ When Nixon dismissed Rockefeller’s ambitious new programs to address the urban crisis as “pie in the sky,” Rockefeller responded by insisting that America’s cities would never be saved “by men (such as Nixon) who read speeches about crime control- and say not a word about gun control.”¹³¹ Against Nixon’s silence on his plan for Vietnam, Rockefeller revealed a four-part plan by Henry Kissinger that was the most detailed of any candidate, calling for a military stand-down, separation of warring forces by a multinational force created for the purpose, internationally supervised elections, and finally negotiations over Vietnam’s future.¹³² The government needed to act boldly and decisively to address the urban crisis and Vietnam, and Rockefeller saw Nixon’s law and order rhetoric and silence on Vietnam wholly inadequate to meet these challenges. While Rockefeller’s efforts had brought new life to his campaign, it was yet to be seen if this would win him the nomination.

In their one-hundred-day non-primary campaign, Rockefeller’s campaign achieved some level of success, being found to have the support of 400 of the 667 delegates needed to win in Miami Beach according to a CBS News Election Unit through their wooing of state delegates.¹³³ This support, however, was insufficient to give Rockefeller a victory on the first ballot even as it opened possibilities for subsequent ballots. So, the campaign needed to prevent a first-round Nixon victory to allow for the subsequent coalescence around Rockefeller. They needed to Stop

¹²⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 697.

¹³⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 697.

¹³¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 697.

¹³² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 697.

¹³³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 692-693.

Nixon. In this Stop Nixon agenda, the campaign found an ally in Ronald Reagan who had increasingly strong showings in Republican primaries that May.¹³⁴ This is not to say that Reagan was an entirely willing participant in this effort. When Rockefeller practically forced himself into Reagan's hotel suite in New Orleans on May 20, Reagan refused to discuss the Stop Nixon agenda, later even renouncing the vice presidency.¹³⁵ In July, however, Reagan did state his plan was to contest the nomination to the end.¹³⁶ With the polls behind him, a chance to prevent a first-round Nixon win, and a plan to consolidate the party behind him, Rockefeller prepared for the Republican National Convention. However, when the convention came, this all seemed to fall apart.

A few days before the convention opened, a Gallup poll was released that showed Nixon outperforming Rockefeller against Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy.¹³⁷ The polls as primary strategy that they had pursued throughout the primary was thus completely undercut. The strategy had relied upon no poll contradicting their assertion that Rockefeller was more electable, but this poll did exactly that. Despite this, the Rockefeller operation pressed on in attempting to prevent a first-round Nixon victory. To do so, they needed to retain the entire New Jersey delegation and win fifty of the sixty-four Pennsylvanian delegates. While they were doing this, they also had to hope that the Reagan campaign would be able to win over Nixon's southern delegates to his cause, particularly from the state of Florida. Just as their polls as primary strategy had collapsed, so too did this effort to prevent a first-round win. Eighteen New Jersey delegates, twenty-two Pennsylvanian delegates, and the entirety of the Florida delegation went to Nixon, giving him a first-round victory and thus the nomination.¹³⁸ It is difficult to argue that this

¹³⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 694.

¹³⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 694.

¹³⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 699.

¹³⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 701.

¹³⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 702-703.

outcome was not inevitable. This primary strategy was a gamble, relying upon opinion polls that were subject to fluctuation and contradiction to make the case for his candidacy as well as assistance, even if indirect, from conservatives who already despised him from previous campaigns to open the door for him to step through. Regardless, with this victory by Nixon, Rockefeller ended his third and final presidential campaign. At a press conference that evening, Rockefeller was asked to explain his repeated failures as a candidate, and he responded, “Have you ever been to a Republican National Convention?”¹³⁹ Thus, Rockefeller’s three presidential campaigns built up a sense of anger and distrust among conservatives against Rockefeller, seeing him as a spoilsport and enemy of their movement. More than this, though, it established a firm identity of Rockefeller ideologically, an identity that further contributed to their hatred of him.

¹³⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 704.

“A Democratic Heart with a Republican Head”

Rockefeller defined himself as possessing “a Democratic heart with a Republican head,” having “[his] roots in the New Deal.”¹⁴⁰ While not totally explaining the phenomenon of liberal Republicanism, sometimes described as Rockefeller Republicanism, this definition does serve as a good general impression of what it stood for. Rockefeller Republicanism advocated for conservative fiscal policies alongside liberal social policies with a special emphasis on civil rights. This combination of fiscal prudence and social conscience were the building blocks of Rockefeller Republicanism. The fiscal prudence can be seen in his enthusiasm for block grants that would give states and localities control over social programs, and his commitment to “pay as you go” principles. Anticipating the 1964 campaign, Rockefeller also attacked President John F Kennedy on the subject of taxes. Rockefeller called for an immediate cut of \$10 billion in personal and corporate taxes, expecting that this would result in a spurt of economic activity that would in turn lead to a surplus within a few years. While Kennedy also proposed tax cuts, his proposal was for an \$8.7 billion tax cut over thirty months. Thus, both the scale as well as the speed of the tax cuts saw Rockefeller firmly placed to the right of Kennedy. On the other hand, Rockefeller lent strong support for civil rights causes, expanding fair housing laws in New York, strengthening minority access to New York state contracts and construction projects, and even giving Dr. Martin Luther King money to bail out those arrested during the Children’s March.¹⁴¹ This fight for civil rights stood as the issue on which he stood as a vanguard in his party in both 1960 and 1964, advocating for strong positions against conservative calls for ignoring the issue. Throughout this time, there were those who remarked on the disadvantages this brought, but Rockefeller insisted, “We have certain responsibilities that transcend political advantage, and

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, P. 26, 671.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, P. 18, 517-518.

one of them is certainly in the field of civil rights.”¹⁴² Thus, even as he had conservative policies when it came to those economic matters of the head, he had liberal policies when it came to those matters of the heart.

Another intrinsic part of Rockefeller Republicanism, spawned from its own syncretism, was a belief in pursuing solutions that would work irrespective of ideology. Rather than worrying about the color of the cat, Rockefeller Republicanism wanted to know if it could catch mice. In addition, Rockefeller Republicanism believed in the capacity of government to solve issues. Rather than agreeing with the notion that the government that governs least is the best or, as Ronald Reagan put it, that government itself is the problem, Rockefeller Republicanism fully believed that nothing was outside of the government’s ability to effect positive change. The best example of the desire to pursue solutions regardless of ideology and staunch belief in the ability of government to effect change also stands as a tarnish on Rockefeller’s record among many: Rockefeller’s War on Drugs. While standing staunchly against drugs his entire career, the solution he pursued evolved as the war continued. In 1962, his first antidrug program saw addiction branded as a disease rather than a crime, allowing addicts accused of certain felonies to commit themselves to a three-year course of treatment and rehabilitation in lieu of incarceration. Treating addiction as a public health crisis rather than a crime, it sought to give those who desired to get better the resources to get better. However, this system was short-circuited by an overcrowded court system that reduced most of the felony charges to misdemeanors, leaving these addicts to remain addicts. So, in 1966, Rockefeller began to propose compulsory treatment for addicts, using the power of the state to separate drug consumers from the supply. This treatment of addicts as virtual criminals was heavily criticized, but Rockefeller remained committed to compulsory treatment, creating a three-year intensive rehabilitation regimen

¹⁴² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 518.

triggered by anyone applying for an order certifying an addict to a treatment facility.¹⁴³ Yet just as his previous attempt faltered, so too did this, resulting in Rockefeller's third and final drug war in 1973. Rather than treat addiction as a disease, it would be treated as a crime.¹⁴⁴ He proposed life sentences for those using or trafficking heroin and other narcotics, LSD, amphetamines, and hashish, similar sentences to those who committed a violent crime under the influence of such drugs, and \$1,000 cash bounties for any New Yorker who provided information leading to the apprehension and conviction of drug dealers.¹⁴⁵ While this harsh bill, criticized by liberals as the "ghetto genocide bill" and by conservatives as increasing the risk to officers from suspects whose mandated life sentences might loosen their trigger finger, was eventually softened before its passage, the initial proposal reflects Rockefeller's desire to effect change in the drug war regardless of how it was achieved.¹⁴⁶ While some may point to this as evidence of a wider trend toward conservatism Rockefeller displayed before his Vice Presidency, it speaks more to Rockefeller's desire to find any solution to the crisis of drug use. Michael Whiteman, Rockefeller's legal counsel during his last term as governor, explained that this program was highly influenced by Japan. Rockefeller, searching for a solution to the drug menace, sent Bill Fine, an upscale realtor, to Japan to see why the country had such low addiction rates. Fine returned convinced that the secret was Japan's laws mandating life sentences for drug pushers, and he convinced Rockefeller. So, Rockefeller brought those laws from Japan to New York. Whiteman imagined Rockefeller saying, "I've tried everything else. Here's a bright new idea."¹⁴⁷ Despite their harshness, these efforts were no more successful than his earlier ventures. While Rockefeller was never able to enact further reforms, his brother

¹⁴³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 607.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 823.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 824.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 825-826, 828.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 829.

Laurance Rockefeller insists that he would have devised yet another plan if he saw this plan did not succeed.¹⁴⁸ While one may be tempted to dismiss the words of someone with a vested interest in protecting his brother's historical reputation, given Rockefeller's cycling between efforts in his life, it is quite likely Rockefeller would have begun a fourth war on drugs utilizing all new methods, never losing faith in the ability of government to solve the problem.

Rockefeller was far from the only liberal in the Republican Party. There was the already mentioned Pennsylvanian Governor William Scranton who had allied with Rockefeller to oppose Goldwater in 1964. There was also Michigan Governor George Romney, the self-professed citizen politician with a strong civil rights record. Rockefeller supported Romney very early in the 1968 campaign, lending him research, speechwriting services, and foreign policy expertise. And when Romney's campaign collapsed, in part due saying he was brainwashed during a visit to Vietnam, Rockefeller stepped in to fill the gap Romney had left.¹⁴⁹ Another prominent liberal Republican was New York Senator Jacob Javits. He attempted to contest Goldwater's position as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee in 1961, only dropping his challenge at Rockefeller's heavy pressure campaign for him to do so. He hated Goldwater for what he was doing to the Republican Party and conservatism, disapprovingly saying, "He's made it respectable to be conservative again."¹⁵⁰ Finally, there was New York Senator Charles Goodell. Appointed to fill the seat left by Robert Kennedy's assassination, he was initially seen as a moderate. But during his short term in the Senate, he underwent a profound transformation that made him one of the harshest critics of the Vietnam War, even introducing legislation to cut off funding for the war entirely.¹⁵¹ Thus, far from being alone in the party, Rockefeller had many

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 829.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 649-650, 671.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 468.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 707, 749.

liberal Republican colleagues. However, Rockefeller stood as the most prominent among them. He was the candidate who championed the liberal wing in nomination contests time and time again.

Considering Rockefeller's similarity to Democrats on many proposals, one might ask why Rockefeller was not a Democrat himself. And there were those who urged him to become a Democrat. In addition to the already mentioned urging by Hubert Humphrey in 1968, President Harry Truman in 1951 urged Rockefeller to become a Democrat.¹⁵² In both instances, however, Rockefeller turned them down. While some of this may be attributed to his familial connection to the Republican Party with his grandfather being Senator Nelson Wilmarth Aldrich, this also boils down to Rockefeller's preference for "pushing the GOP elephant forward [rather] than holding the Democratic donkey back."¹⁵³ Rockefeller's reason for holding the Democratic donkey back was his fiscal conservatism. This fiscal conservatism did not prevent him from supporting massive projects and government spending. Rather, it was directed at the management of funds and balanced budgets. For an example of his fiscal conservatism with the management of funds, one can look to revenue sharing, what would become a key issue for Rockefeller in his later years as governor. Rather than the federal government operating hundreds of programs across the country wastefully, block grants would be given to the states, allowing them to operate the programs themselves efficiently and be more responsive to local circumstances. The aims and intent of liberal programs were not opposed, only the method of executing them. There were simply more efficient ways to achieve these goals according to Rockefeller. Thus, while this was a conservative fiscal proposal, it had liberal social implications.¹⁵⁴ For an example of his concern for the balanced budgets, one can look to "pay as you go." Pursued with vigor when he was first

¹⁵² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 281-282.

¹⁵³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, P. pg. 18, 2.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 692, 717.

elected governor, Rockefeller attempted to bring revenues in line with expenditures, eliminating costly borrowing. Whenever there were increases in spending, there had to be increases in taxation. The budget needed to be balanced. So, when Rockefeller presented his \$2 billion budget with increases in spending as well as aid to localities and highway construction in 1958, he also pushed a one-cent gas tax, a two-cent increase in cigarette taxes, and three new tax brackets to the top of the tax schedule. While he was made to make some cuts to the budget, the budget passed largely unscathed. Rockefeller, excited by the potential this offered him in the future, told an aide, “We can go ahead with our program now. This should give us what we need to work on.”¹⁵⁵ With the money raised through the increases, Rockefeller could spend on his social programs. However, pay as you go was eventually abandoned with the new Democratic majority elected to the State Legislature in 1964. Rockefeller proposed the first \$3 billion budget with massive spending on welfare, social causes, education, housing, and public facilities, arguing that it was needed since Democrats would outspend him in these areas if left to their own devices without his concern about deficit spending.¹⁵⁶ From pushing forward his state legislature when it was conservative, he was holding it back when it was liberal. While Rockefeller was opposed to the pursuit of a balanced budget at the expense of essential services, evidenced by his criticisms of Eisenhower and proposals for tax cuts, it was a goal that was certainly striven for. Thus, while Rockefeller aligned with Democrats on many social proposals, their fiscal differences prevented Rockefeller from ever abandoning the Grand Old Party for them.

Conservatives in the Republican Party, looking at Rockefeller’s willingness to try anything as well as his mix of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism, saw his proposals as indistinguishable from the New Deal. He was seen as too liberal to be truly Republican, acting as

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 396-400.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 599-600.

the antithesis of the Republicanism championed by Goldwater and his fellow conservatives- which offered a “choice, not an echo” of Democrats’ big government agenda. While Rockefeller may have made attempts to mollify conservative opposition in later years, the opposition continued to lambast him as a Me Too Republican and not soften its hostility to him.¹⁵⁷ When he was nominated for the Vice Presidency, Rockefeller stepped into the middle of this conservative opposition who despised him for his ideology and previous attempts at the presidency.

¹⁵⁷ Marsha E Barrett, 2022, “Defining Rockefeller Republicanism: Promise and Peril at the Edge of the Liberal Consensus, 1958–1975,” *Journal of Policy History* : JPH 34 (3): 336–70, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030622000100>; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, P.6.

The Hearings

While conservatives may have raged regarding Rockefeller's nomination, the overwhelming praise from all other sectors made his confirmation virtually assured.¹⁵⁸ The only question that remained open was how long the process would take. The chairmen of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees refused to commit to any target date. The House Judiciary Committee Chairman, Democrat Peter Rodino, even suggested it would occur after the midterm elections that November. While he said the committee would confirm Rockefeller as quickly as possible, other members of the committee were not so accepting of this promise. Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, a ranking Republican on the committee, suggested that if Rockefeller's confirmation took longer than the eight weeks it had taken to confirm Ford, "Somebody's going to be guilty of foot dragging."¹⁵⁹ If Hutchinson's assessment is correct, then time would show that someone certainly was guilty of that. For nearly the next four months, Rockefeller would remain unconfirmed. Democrats, holding majorities in both chambers and presumably not wanting the new Vice President to go stumping for Republicans for the midterms, held vigorous and extensive hearings.¹⁶⁰ Rockefeller was grilled regarding his governorship, ranging from his handling of crises such as the Attica prison uprising as well as his handling of more mundane matters such as the state's finances.¹⁶¹ However, one of the main targets of the investigation was that which had preoccupied the press during his initial press conference: his personal finances. These were extensively investigated. To these investigators, Rockefeller supplied his personal income tax returns of the past seven years, his gift tax returns of the past seventeen years, made public all his assets and trusts, his gifts and loans to family and

¹⁵⁸ Jim Adams, "Rockefeller," AP, August 21, 1974, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/25thamend/ap_report.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Adams, "Rockefeller."

¹⁶⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 224; Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 82.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 849.

friends, and his donations to the committees to investigate.¹⁶² However, with this openness came questions about some of the skeletons in Rockefeller's closet.

Three matters uncovered during examinations of Rockefeller's finances became targets of further scrutiny: his distribution of gifts, his financing of a campaign biography, and his personal income taxes. Taking these one at a time, his distribution of gifts saw him give huge amounts of money to those working for the public.¹⁶³ Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger received \$50,000 just before assuming the position, Bill Ronan received \$625,000 as he transferred from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and others received similar lavish gifts, summing up to almost \$2 million split among twenty individuals. Rockefeller, in addressing these gifts, argued that they were made to attract and retain public servants of the highest caliber. Rather than being made to buy loyalty or favors, they were made to buy knowledge and ability.¹⁶⁴ He justified his gift to Ronan by saying he was someone with "the balls" to fight for mass transit.¹⁶⁵ Still, he continued to face scrutiny, so to satisfy critics, he agreed to stop personally supplementing any federal employee's salary.¹⁶⁶ In addition, it emerged that during his 1970 gubernatorial campaign, he had been involved in the creation of a derogatory biography of Arthur Goldberg, his opponent.¹⁶⁷ This dirty trick would have been bad enough in the post-Watergate environment Rockefeller found himself in, but it was made worse by his early statement that he was not involved in its production, instead pointing the finger at his brother Laurance Rockefeller.¹⁶⁸ On this matter, Rockefeller conceded he had done wrong, confessing, "I made a mistake. I made a hasty, ill-

¹⁶² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 223-224.

¹⁶³ Tom Wicker, "Mr. Rockefeller's Ordeal," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/01/archives/mr-rockefellers-ordeal-in-the-nation.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 849-851; Wicker, "Mr. Rockefeller's Ordeal."

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 851.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 853.

¹⁶⁷ Wicker, "Mr. Rockefeller's Ordeal."

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 747; Wicker, "Mr. Rockefeller's Ordeal."

considered decision in the middle of a hectic campaign.”¹⁶⁹ Finally, his income tax returns showed that he paid no federal income tax in 1970 and was then being assessed \$903,718 plus interest in back taxes.¹⁷⁰ While Rockefeller had paid about \$7 million in capital gains taxes and other levies that year and nearly half his total income in taxes over the previous decade, this brought further scrutiny to his already highly questioned finances.¹⁷¹ The level at which his finances came under question is best demonstrated by Iowa Representative Edward Mezvinsky who demanded complete disclosure of all financial and property holdings by every member of the Rockefeller family.¹⁷² This demand nearly killed Rockefeller’s nomination. It only survived through a compromise whereby the Rockefeller Foundation would supply their aggregate holdings to the last dollar and Rockefeller would put his personal assets in a blind trust and breakdown the assets of his personal fortune.¹⁷³ Yet even as Rockefeller addressed these matters and put them to rest, he remained unconfirmed.

President Ford, for his part, watched these proceedings both uncomfortable that he had no Vice President to replace him should something happen and angry over the treatment Rockefeller was receiving.¹⁷⁴ He believed that his critics were simply out to humiliate him, wanting “the last pound of flesh.”¹⁷⁵ This anger only deepened when he heard discussion about not confirming Rockefeller until the new Congress convened in January, leading him to begin to heavily pressure Congressional leadership to confirm Rockefeller.¹⁷⁶ In a letter sent to Congressional leadership, he contrasted the “careful but expeditious” examination he had gone through with the examination that Rockefeller was experiencing that saw neither house of Congress having

¹⁶⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 851.

¹⁷⁰ Wicker, “Mr. Rockefeller’s Ordeal.”

¹⁷¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 850.

¹⁷² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 851.

¹⁷³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 853.

¹⁷⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 223.

¹⁷⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 224.

¹⁷⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 224.

completed examination after twelve weeks. He then said that the primary issue that should be considered was not Rockefeller's personal wealth but his "wealth of experience." Finally, Ford said that it was essential that Congress complete the confirmation process with the highest priority after its return on November 18, requesting the Congressional leadership's assistance in accomplishing this goal.¹⁷⁷ Democrats, no longer needing to delay the confirmation for political reasons following the midterms, moved to expedite the process per Ford's request, even enlisting Shirley Chisholm to accomplish it. She asked her liberal colleagues where they had been when Rockefeller had stood up for women's rights with his protection of New York's liberal abortion law, environmentalism with his Pure Waters program, and organized labor with his passage of the first state minimum wage law and the extension of collective bargaining to public employees. She wrote to each member of the House Rules Committee and fifteen members of the Black Caucus arguing against any delay.¹⁷⁸ And her efforts succeeded. On December 10, 1974, Senators voted 90-7 to confirm Rockefeller with the House joining them on December 19 with 287-128.¹⁷⁹ Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller was finally Vice President of the United States of America. But while he had prevailed, the voting record showed that opposition to him would not be going away. For while both chambers saw Democrats cast a majority of the votes against Rockefeller, the Republican conservative resistance promised by Helms at the beginning of the process did show itself.¹⁸⁰ In the Senate, Barry Goldwater, Jesse Helms, and William Lloyd Scott

¹⁷⁷ Gerald R Ford, "Request to Expedite Rockefeller's Hearings, Draft 2," November 8, 1974, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/25thamend/fordlettertocongress_draft.pdf, 1-3.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 853-854.

¹⁷⁹ GovTrack.U.S., "H.R.1511- 93rd Congress (1973-1974): Resolution Confirming Nelson A. Rockefeller As Vice President of the United States," December 19, 1974, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1974/h1070>; GovTrack.U.S., "Senate Vote 1092- 93rd Congress (1973-1974): "To Confirm the Nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller to Be Vice-President of the U.S.," December 10, 1974, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/93-1974/s1092>.

¹⁸⁰ GovTrack.U.S., "Resolution Confirming Nelson A. Rockefeller;" GovTrack.U.S., "To Confirm the Nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller to Be Vice-President of the U.S."

voted against confirmation, being joined in the House by thirty other Republicans.¹⁸¹ Thus, Rockefeller still had to contend with the hatred of him from the right wing of his party. It would thus be quite a decisive mistake to further agitate them.

¹⁸¹ GovTrack.U.S., “Resolution Confirming Nelson A. Rockefeller;” GovTrack.U.S., “To Confirm the Nomination of Nelson A. Rockefeller to Be Vice-President of the U.S.”

Against the Southern Strategy

Ford, when later attempting to explain the animus between “ultra-conservative” Republicans and Rockefeller, blamed Rockefeller’s past presidential campaigns. It was the stands he had taken and the things he had said that did him in rather than anything he had done as Vice President.¹⁸² Ford may have been led to believe this due to Rockefeller doing relatively little in the administration that could anger conservatives. While Rockefeller had been promised he would be a crucial figure in devising domestic policy, this promise fell to the wayside as a pattern emerged within the administration.¹⁸³ Rockefeller would propose new federal initiatives to Ford during an individual meeting with him, Ford would hand the proposal to Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld to assess within the administration, and it would inevitably be denied based on the internal rule laid out by Ford that there were to be with very few exceptions no new spending initiatives.¹⁸⁴ The only break from this pattern came with the Energy Independence Authority (EIA), which was to be a government corporation with massive backing that would help America achieve energy independence. The EIA was to make loans and loan guarantees, cut through the red tape surrounding design and construction, and encourage the risky pursuit of new technologies. After ten years, the EIA was to go out of business having accomplished its goal. However, the EIA soon came under heavy scrutiny within the administration with its borrowing authority internally cut from \$200 billion to \$75 billion, Treasury Secretary Bill Simon and Donald Rumsfeld criticizing it as unfeasible, and Ford himself saying that it “has no prayer.”¹⁸⁵ Despite all this, Ford still sent the bill to Congress with his blessing, but the EIA, further reduced and modified by Congress, was defeated in the House of Representatives.¹⁸⁶ Thus, Rockefeller

¹⁸² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 327.

¹⁸³ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 187.

¹⁸⁴ Cheney, *In My Time*, 72.

¹⁸⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 867-869.

¹⁸⁶ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 188-189.

had little impact on the sphere Ford had promised him to gain his acceptance of the Vice Presidency. Apart from this neutered role in domestic affairs, the only other job in the administration given to Rockefeller was to lead a commission investigating the CIA following revelations about unsavory and illegal practices and charged with recommendations on how to avoid further instances of them.¹⁸⁷ In completing this assignment, the Rockefeller Commission avoided major controversy, despite certain political landmines that threatened it. In fact, rather than hurting Rockefeller's image among conservatives, this commission may have helped. Reagan worked alongside Rockefeller on the commission, and the work, jokes, and stories the two shared with one during their time on it may have served to reduce the animus Rockefeller faced from conservatives.¹⁸⁸ But while Rockefeller's actions within the administration did not anger conservatives, his actions as the presiding officer of the Senate did. For Rockefeller, within weeks of his confirmation, took them on over two issues sure to enrage them: filibuster reform and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

On February 20, 1975, the Senate began to debate Senate Rule 22, a provision dictating the number of votes needed to invoke cloture and prevent a filibuster.¹⁸⁹ Liberal senators led by Democrat Walter Mondale of Minnesota and Republican James Pearson of Kansas sought to reform this rule, reducing the number of votes needed from two-thirds to three-fifths.¹⁹⁰ This plan was resisted by conservatives, particularly those southerners who had used the filibuster to block civil rights legislation in the past. Rockefeller, in his capacity as the Vice President and thus the presiding officer of the Senate, stepped into the middle of this debate as it became a question of whether the Senate could change its rules by a simple majority vote or whether they

¹⁸⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 229-230.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 874-876.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 862-863.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 863.

had to follow Rule 22 in this action. Either position would tip the scales in one side's favor, and Rockefeller found himself coming down on the liberal side of the issue. When the Senate voted 51-42 to reject Majority Leader Mike Mansfield's point of order saying Pearson's motion to cut debate by a simple majority vote was a violation of Rule 22, Rockefeller took this as an endorsement of the liberal contention that Rule 22 could be modified by a similar majority vote.¹⁹¹ Due to this, it seemed that Rule 22 changing was a question of if rather than when, but conservatives were not ready to throw in the towel just yet.

Conservatives first tried to convince Rockefeller to change his position with legal arguments, but Rockefeller maintained that his legal duty was to allow a simple majority vote. When they threatened to block any Ford legislation from becoming law, Rockefeller refused to give in. Finally, they turned to forcing a filibuster of the vote.¹⁹² Rockefeller responded to this final effort by simply ignoring conservative points of order and parliamentary inquiries.¹⁹³ With conservatives shouting for the chair's attention and Goldwater angrily charging toward the rostrum, Rockefeller announced, "The clerk will call the roll."¹⁹⁴ While this was technically permitted by the precedents of the Senate, conservatives construed it as a grave violation of senatorial courtesy.¹⁹⁵ In the words of Goldwater, while it was permitted, "I never thought I would see the day when the Chair would take advantage of it."¹⁹⁶ If this matter saw Rockefeller alienating conservatives on procedural grounds, his actions later that year in regards to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did so for policy reasons.

¹⁹¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 863-864.

¹⁹² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 864-865.

¹⁹³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 865.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 865.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 865.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 865.

In 1975, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was up for renewal, setting the stage for a debate of whether to preserve the act in its existing form or dilute the legislation. Conservatives offered an amendment to strike out the existing formula that determined when states come under the terms of the law. Through this change, the Justice Department would have to approve any changes in election laws or district lines in every election district in the nation, effectively eliminating the special protections offered to minorities in the South.¹⁹⁷ The Justice Department, stretched so thin by the law, would be unable to properly enforce it. Amid this debate within the Senate and White House about what action to take, Rockefeller called Richard Parsons, an aide during his earlier filibuster fight. Rockefeller, stating his desire to do the right thing and not turn away from the fight for civil rights, asked Parson what he should do. Parsons responded, “you got to go against the southern strategy.”¹⁹⁸ So, Rockefeller made it known that he would support extending the Voting Rights Act in its current form, handing down favorable rulings from the chair in the fight to preserve it. With these actions, Rockefeller made the already intense hatred of him by conservatives even worse, seeing the effects of their old enemy in government. And this hatred did not offer good prospects of his remaining on the Republican ticket come the 1976 election. Parsons, for his part, directly pointed the finger to Rockefeller’s actions regarding filibuster reform and the Voting Rights Act with costing him a place on the ticket in 1976.¹⁹⁹ However, for him to be dropped, there had to be a primary challenge to Ford that was sufficiently strong to necessitate his being dumped. It was the case that the selection of Rockefeller and his subsequent actions had already motivated conservatives to put up some

¹⁹⁷ Richard L. Madden, “Senate Modifies Voting Act Plan,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1975. <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/07/24/archives/senate-modifies-voting-act-plan.html>; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 865.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 866.

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 866.

challenge against Ford, likely through Reagan, but it was Ford's actions in the international sphere that made such a challenge real.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 121.

The Helsinki Accords and Détente

The Ford administration's foreign policy was torn between two impulses. On one hand stood classical realism. Practiced by Ford's predecessor Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, realists attempted to balance power between the United States and the Soviet Union through arms limitation and control agreements and pursued détente with China and the Soviet Union.²⁰¹ On the other stood what became known as neoconservatism. Championed by Ronald Reagan, neoconservatism called for a more aggressive foreign policy with special concern paid to human liberty.²⁰² Within this paradigm, Rockefeller found himself landing squarely on the realist side. Having first met Kissinger in September 1955, Rockefeller developed a long-standing friendship with the Harvard professor, and Rockefeller's foreign policy ideas came to be greatly shaped by Kissinger's arguments.²⁰³ As has been mentioned, in his 1968 campaign for the presidency, Rockefeller spoke of "building bridges" with Communist China, stressed the need to never again engage "with a commitment looking for a justification" like Vietnam, and proposed a comprehensive four-part plan for withdrawing from Vietnam.²⁰⁴ He was thus a committed realist in the Ford administration, pushing for a continuation of the status quo in foreign policy against the neoconservative challenge and was a consistent supporter of Kissinger's positions within the Cabinet.²⁰⁵ Ford, for his part, attempted to balance the policies and initiatives he had inherited from Nixon's realist foreign policy with the increasing calls for action from neoconservatives.²⁰⁶ To mollify these neoconservatives, he voiced support for Ukrainian anti-Soviet dissidents and signed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment that limited trade with nations with nonmarket economies that restricted Jewish emigration, particularly the Soviet

²⁰¹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 158.

²⁰² Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 158.

²⁰³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 324.

²⁰⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 692, 696, 697.

²⁰⁵ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 186.

²⁰⁶ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 159.

Union.²⁰⁷ Despite these efforts, neoconservatives would find Ford's foreign policy unacceptable, and this assessment arose from the Helsinki Conference and the actions taken before its commencement.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a Russian novelist and historian who wrote *The Gulag Archipelago*, a three-volume work about the brutal life in Soviet camps in part based on personal experiences.²⁰⁸ Having been exiled from the Soviet Union and resettling in Vermont, Solzhenitsyn expressed a wish to meet Ford before the Helsinki Conference, a request communicated by the committed neoconservative Senator Jesse Helms.²⁰⁹ The decision of whether to meet such a staunch, famous anti-Soviet thinker before such a critical conference with the Soviets sparked an intense debate within the administration. Dick Cheney led the effort within the administration to convince Ford to meet Solzhenitsyn, arguing it would be out of character for the president not to meet him given his past openness to meeting nearly anyone regardless of their differences. Further, this deviation would send a message leading to a "misreading of détente," signaling that the United States was now friendly with the Soviet Union and that political concerns came before human ones. Meanwhile, the National Security Council argued that this meeting would be seen as a provocation, threatening détente. Kissinger went even further in his attempts to dissuade Ford, warning that the meeting might cause the resumption of a more hostile, dangerous relationship with the Soviet Union.²¹⁰ Ford thus had to weigh the domestic policy benefits of meeting Solzhenitsyn against the foreign policy benefits of not meeting Solzhenitsyn. In the end, Ford came down on the latter side, informing Solzhenitsyn that he was too busy to meet him before leaving for Helsinki.²¹¹ This snub, compounded by

²⁰⁷ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 159.

²⁰⁸ Cheney, *In My Time*, 78.

²⁰⁹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 78; Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 159.

²¹⁰ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 160, 162.

²¹¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 298.

Ford's decision not to attend an AFL-CIO dinner convened in Solzhenitsyn's honor, caused a flurry of criticism from the press, the Congress, and Solzhenitsyn himself.²¹² After seeing the damage his decision had caused him, Ford extended an invitation to meet the writer following his return from Helsinki. Solzhenitsyn, however, responded that he was too busy to come to Washington.²¹³ With this distrust from neoconservatives already firmly established by this incident, Ford then turned to Helsinki, adding fuel to the fire.

Before Ford left for Helsinki, Ronald Reagan said, "I am against [the Helsinki conference], and I think all Americans should be against it." Reagan was joined in this assessment by hundreds of Americans who wrote to the White House as well as Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian groups who held a vigil in front of the White House. Ford, however, refused to bend to these calls, arguing that this was a chance to get a commitment for greater freedom for those behind the Iron Curtain, open the possibilities of further arm control agreements, and not give up Eastern Europe to permanent Soviet occupation.²¹⁴ This assessment of the potential of the Helsinki Conference would prove to mostly come to fruition. While the conference ended without another arm control agreement, it did result in the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or the Helsinki Accords.²¹⁵ This thirty-five-nation accord included strong human rights language, recognizing the freedoms of thought, conscience, and belief as universal human rights.²¹⁶ In addition, it also affirmed the respect for national borders and the sovereignty of countries to manage their own affairs.²¹⁷ While Ford and his advisors emphasized the achievement of the former part of the agreement, especially seeing

²¹² Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 162-163.

²¹³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 298.

²¹⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 300-301.

²¹⁵ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 164-165.

²¹⁶ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 165.

²¹⁷ Cheney, *In My Time*, 78; Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 164.

as it addressed neoconservative concerns, Ford's critics emphasized the latter part.²¹⁸ This recognition of national boundaries was seen as legitimizing the Soviet control of Eastern Europe, causing outcry from American citizens of Baltic decent.²¹⁹ And the hatred of the Helsinki Agreement seemed to dominate the public consciousness. Of the 133 letters sent to the White House immediately after the conference, only 11 letters approved the accords.²²⁰ The conservative outrage over détente had persisted despite Ford's efforts. From the simple rumblings of a potential challenge by Reagan, Ford came to realize that he would have to contend with a real challenge from his right through Reagan. And as he considered how to approach the race, Rockefeller was a sticking point.

²¹⁸ Cheney, *In My Time*, 78.

²¹⁹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 78; Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 306.

²²⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 306.

The Dropping of Rockefeller

Although Ford had decided upon Rockefeller as his running mate in 1976 before even formally announcing his candidacy, this determination came under question in late 1975.²²¹ In late August, Republicans were found to favor Reagan over Rockefeller as Ford's running mate.²²² While this preference was marginal, 44 percent for Reagan versus 40 percent for Rockefeller, this poll also showed the geographic divides in the party with the South and West preferring Reagan and the East preferring Rockefeller.²²³ Also, in mid-September, a Harris poll gave Rockefeller a negative approval rating with twenty-five percent of Republicans saying they would not vote for Ford if Rockefeller remained on the ticket.²²⁴ Finally, an internal poll of the preference of Pennsylvania voters showed that Reagan was preferred to Rockefeller as Ford's running mate.²²⁵ Meanwhile, within the administration, political advisors told the president to drop Rockefeller. Dick Cheney, for example, argued that Rockefeller was a liability in a race against Reagan in which he would need to capture part of the conservative base, an impossible task in his assessment with Rockefeller beside him.²²⁶ Ford mulled over this for "a sleepless night or two," knowing of Rockefeller's loyalty to him and his willingness to do whatever he asked of him.²²⁷ All this culminated in a meeting between Ford and Rockefeller on October 28, 1975.

Accounts of what precisely transpired in the meeting between Ford and Rockefeller varies. Cheney, for his part, says that Ford told Rockefeller he would not be on the ticket.²²⁸

²²¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 296.

²²² "Gallup Poll Sees Reagan Ahead of Rockefeller," *New York Times*, August 28, 1975, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/08/28/archives/gallup-poll-sees-reagan-ahead-of-rockefeller.html>.

²²³ "Gallup Poll Sees Reagan Ahead of Rockefeller," *New York Times*.

²²⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 327.

²²⁵ Robert M Teeter, "Ford Approval and Ballot Results - Summary of 1975 Market Opinion Research (MOR) Polls," October 6, 1975, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0027/1691399.pdf>, 28.

²²⁶ Cheney, *In My Time*, 81.

²²⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 327; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 886.

²²⁸ Cheney, *In My Time*, 82.

Rockefeller, meanwhile, said that Ford brought up that his political advisors had said Rockefeller would be a liability, saying he thought that it would be helpful if he withdrew.²²⁹ Finally, Ford said that he brought up the difficulty he would face if he remained on the ticket, saying that he was simply stating facts rather than asking him to withdraw.²³⁰ Regardless of what truly happened in that meeting, Rockefeller did withdraw as Ford's running mate. On November 3, Rockefeller sent a letter to Ford for public release in which he formally withdrew from consideration as Ford's running mate.²³¹ In the letter, Rockefeller explained that since "the time is virtually at hand when you will be firming up your program for the Presidential primaries... it will clearly help you in this task if the range of options is simplified at the earliest time."²³² And to help simplify his range of options, Rockefeller said "that I do not wish my name to enter into your consideration for the upcoming Republican Vice Presidential nominee."²³³ While he made no references to the right-wing opposition that had prompted this decision, he was more candid a few days later when he said that party squabbles had prompted this decision. Not wanting to get caught in party squabbles that would make matters more difficult in an already challenging time, he had removed himself, eliminating in his eyes the basis of much of the squabble. Rockefeller, however, did not concede that he was a liability, nor did he think that he would have been forced off the ticket, saying that the right-wing conservatives who had opposed him were "a minority of a minority."²³⁴

²²⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 886.

²³⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 327.

²³¹ Nelson A Rockefeller, "Republican Vice Presidential Nomination Withdrawal Letter," November 3, 1975, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/campaign/005601360-001.pdf>, 3-4.

²³² Rockefeller, "Republican Vice Presidential Nomination Withdrawal Letter," 3.

²³³ Rockefeller, "Republican Vice Presidential Nomination Withdrawal Letter," 4.

²³⁴ Philip Shabecoff, "Rockefeller Declares 'Party Squabbles' Led to Move; Leaves Own Race Open," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1975, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/11/07/archives/new-jersey-pages-rockefeller-declares-party-squabbles-led-to-move.html>.

Ford, at the time, was angry with himself, believing he had been a coward for not saying to the conservatives, “It’s going to be Ford and Rockefeller, whatever the consequences.”²³⁵ Betty Ford was more critical, telling her husband that he was “a damned fool” for getting rid of Rockefeller.²³⁶ Even decades later, Ford still regretted this decision, believing he had let down a friend.²³⁷ While Ford himself had second thoughts, political advisors around him did not share them. To quote Cheney, “Our goal was to get Gerald Ford elected, and there was simply no way to do that with Nelson Rockefeller on the ticket.”²³⁸ While Rockefeller maintained an upbeat demeanor about the whole affair before the press and public, he once let his guard slip before Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland, saying “Who would want to spend another four years with these shits today?”²³⁹ Regardless, Ford and his campaign, having settled the issue of his running mate, turned to addressing the conservative challenge against him.

²³⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 328.

²³⁶ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 887.

²³⁷ Cheney, *In My Time*, 94.

²³⁸ Cheney, *In My Time*, 94.

²³⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 887.

The Reagan Challenge

When it became clear that there was a strong possibility of Ronald Reagan challenging Ford for the Republican nomination, measures were attempted to prevent such a challenge. On two occasions, Donald Rumsfeld approached Reagan and offered him a job in the administration, hoping that this inclusion would prevent a challenge.²⁴⁰ In addition, Ford believed that the main driver of the challenge was animosity toward Rockefeller, so his departure would prevent such a challenge.²⁴¹ Such was the belief in this notion that Cheney even proposed that Ford drop Rockefeller and then call Reagan to ask him to not run for the sake of party unity.²⁴² However, all these efforts to avoid a challenge failed. On November 19, Reagan called Ford, telling him that he was going to run for president.²⁴³ While Ford warned him that it would be divisive and unhelpful, Reagan rejected this, saying it would be neither.²⁴⁴

On November 20, 1975, Reagan announced his candidacy for president.²⁴⁵ In his speech, he emphasized the economic struggles facing America, the excessive size the government had grown to, and the loss of America's military superiority.²⁴⁶ Reagan also attacked the policy of détente, saying that America "must make it plain that we expect a stronger indication that they also seek a lasting peace with us."²⁴⁷ While Reagan did not completely dismiss the policy, this attack's implication that America has not been sufficiently strong on the international stage spoke to the neoconservatives' dissatisfaction with realist foreign policy.²⁴⁸ Reagan then struck a

²⁴⁰ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 122, 195.

²⁴¹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 125.

²⁴² Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 190.

²⁴³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 332-333.

²⁴⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 333.

²⁴⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Announcement for Presidential Candidacy," National Press Club, Washington D.C. November 20, 1975, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/ronald-reagan-announcement-presidential-candidacy>.

²⁴⁶ Reagan, "Announcement for Presidential Candidacy."

²⁴⁷ Reagan, "Announcement for Presidential Candidacy."

²⁴⁸ Reagan, "Announcement for Presidential Candidacy."

populist tone, blaming these problems on Congress, the bureaucracy, lobbyists, big business, and big labor and positioning himself as an outsider who would change Washington just as he changed California.²⁴⁹ The long-rumored fight between Ford and Reagan became real.

While Ford was found by the analyst Robert Teeter to lead Reagan in almost every state as the race began, his support was found to be soft, a product of him not being seen as a forceful leader.²⁵⁰ Rather, he was seen as a hapless, clueless bumbler, a perception not helped by a tumble on wet tarmac during a foreign visit and a spill on the ski slopes.²⁵¹ The prevalence of this impression is most strongly evidenced by Chevy Chase's impression of Ford on *Saturday Night Live*. This impression saw Chase merely trip around stage and stumble his words, not even attempting to impersonate the voice, inflection, or appearance of Ford.²⁵² Teeter thus advised taking actions to change the image of Ford, making him act more presidential to establish the aura he lacked.²⁵³ So, Ford began to take on a stronger, more affirmative, even combative manner.²⁵⁴ Teeter also said the key perception between Ford and Reagan with primary voters was degrees of Republicanism rather than ideology. The difference between them was not their beliefs but rather which of them was more loyal to the party. It was thus key for Ford to establish himself as the regular Republican with Reagan as the dissident, needing the endorsement of respected conservatives in the party to help accomplish this.²⁵⁵ So, Ford had supporters crisscross the country lining up endorsements from prominent Republicans.²⁵⁶ Finally, Teeter warned of the

²⁴⁹ Reagan, "Announcement for Presidential Candidacy."

²⁵⁰ Robert M Teeter, "Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations," November 12, 1975, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0027/1691402.pdf>, 3.

²⁵¹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 79.

²⁵² Saturday Night Live, "Introducing President Ford- SNL," YouTube Video, 2:45, October 4, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bvXZgCryUE.

²⁵³ Teeter, "Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations," 4.

²⁵⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 348.

²⁵⁵ Teeter, "Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations," 7.

²⁵⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 334.

negatives of détente, saying the idea was unpopular and the word even more unpopular.²⁵⁷ Thus, Teeter recommended, “We ought to stop using the word whenever possible.”²⁵⁸ While Ford initially resisted this advice, continuing to stand by détente, as the primaries truly were underway he did begin de-emphasizing it, saying during one March 5 event that “we are going to forget the use of the word détente.”²⁵⁹ In this, Ford made concessions to neoconservatives on matters of foreign policy to win the primary, foreshadowing action that would later be taken during the convention. With these strategies implemented, Ford went on to do quite well in the early primaries.

On February 24, the first primary was held in New Hampshire, and Ford defeated Reagan by a margin of only 1,317 votes.²⁶⁰ While this was a narrow victory, it stalled Reagan’s momentum.²⁶¹ Then, Ford went on to win Massachusetts, Vermont, and Illinois by more substantial margins before eking out another close, yet this time clearer, win in Florida on March 9.²⁶² Reagan, having adopted a two state, New Hampshire and Florida, strategy without planning for a protracted fight, was on the backfoot.²⁶³ So, Reagan escalated his attacks on Ford’s foreign policy. This culminated in a thirty-minute speech broadcast on every North Carolina television station except two just before its March 23 primary. This primary was seen as the last stand for the Reagan campaign, and this speech made it clear that Reagan would not go down without a fight. He attacked Ford for beginning to move away from mentioning détente even as he continued the policy, said that the United States was no longer dealing with other powers from a position of strength, and that the United States should retain the Panama Canal. Following this

²⁵⁷ Teeter, “Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations,” 7.

²⁵⁸ Teeter, “Analysis of Early Research and Strategy Recommendations,” 7.

²⁵⁹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 200-202.

²⁶⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 367.

²⁶¹ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 201.

²⁶² Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 201.

²⁶³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 368.

speech, North Carolina handed Ronald Reagan his first victory in the primary, defeating Ford by six points. From a point of near death, the Reagan campaign roared back to life. Seeing the success of his strategy of attacking Ford on foreign policy in North Carolina, Reagan broadcast another thirty-minute speech on March 31 broadly similar in its content.²⁶⁴

After touching on issues of the economy, the size of government, and other refrains of his campaign, Reagan quoted Winston Churchill's grandson who had recently spoken in Parliament like an echo from the past "warning that the spread of totalitarianism threatens the world once again [as] the democracies are wandering without aim."²⁶⁵ Identifying America as one of those democracies wandering without aim, he pointed to insufficient support for American-aligned forces in Angola, backing away from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to mollify the People's Republic of China, and not demanding to know the fate of American soldiers labeled Missing in Action during their service in Vietnam at the beginning of détente talks with the Soviets.²⁶⁶ Reagan then attacked the negotiations taking place regarding the possession of the Panama Canal Zone, declaring that we should tell the dictator of Panama, "We bought it, we paid for it, we built it, and we intend to keep it."²⁶⁷ Reagan then declared that the U.S. had become number two in the world behind the Soviet Union, asking if this explained Ford's refusal to meet Alexander Solzhenitsyn and his approval through the Helsinki Accords of the enslavement of captive nations.²⁶⁸ Reagan rejected this status quo. He did not believe that the American people were "ready to consign this, the last island of freedom, to the dust bin of history, along with the bones

²⁶⁴ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 203-206.

²⁶⁵ Ronald Reagan, "To Restore America," Televised Address, California, March 31, 1976, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/restore-america>.

²⁶⁶ Reagan, "To Restore America."

²⁶⁷ Reagan, "To Restore America."

²⁶⁸ Reagan, "To Restore America."

of dead civilizations of the past.”²⁶⁹ While it once seemed that the primary was practically over, this speech proved that it would be a long, protracted fight.

Reagan and Ford began to trade victories with each other as the primaries dragged on. Ford won Wisconsin, New York, and Pennsylvania in succession by April 27, and Reagan responded by winning Texas, Alabama, Georgia, and Indiana in succession by May 4.²⁷⁰ Then, on May 11, Ford won West Virginia as Reagan won Nebraska.²⁷¹ Ford then went on to win Maryland and his home state of Michigan on May 18.²⁷² At that point in the race, Reagan was ahead in delegates with the next six primaries scheduled for May 25 seeming dubious for Ford.²⁷³ So, to attempt to cushion the impact, Ford sought to win the support of delegations of various nonprimary states.²⁷⁴ Rockefeller, kept at the fringes of the Ford campaign after calling southern Republican operatives “sons of bitches” who needed to “get off [their] asses and work for Ford and the party” early in the campaign, helped deliver 133 of New York’s delegates to Ford, adding to the 88 Pennsylvania delegates and 18 Vermont delegates pledged that same week.²⁷⁵ On May 25, Ford went on to surprisingly win Kentucky, Tennessee, and Oregon as Reagan only claimed Arkansas, Idaho, and Nebraska.²⁷⁶ In the crucial final primaries, Ford won Ohio and New Jersey as Reagan prevailed in California.²⁷⁷ By the end of the primaries, Ford had 992 delegates with Reagan having 886, meaning neither had the required 1,130 delegates to

²⁶⁹ Reagan, “To Restore America.”

²⁷⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 379-381.

²⁷¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 384.

²⁷² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 386.

²⁷³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 387.

²⁷⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 387.

²⁷⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 387; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 890-893.

²⁷⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 387.

²⁷⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 389.

prevail.²⁷⁸ Thus began the fight for the 267 delegates chosen in conventions, both committed and uncommitted.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 388-389.

²⁷⁹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 389.

The Schweiker Gamble, "Morality in Foreign Policy," and Dole

One night as the Republican National Convention neared, an intruder jumped the White House fence, racing toward the White House across the North Lawn with a three-foot length of pipe in his hand. Despite shouts to stop and a warning shot, he continued his charge, causing the Secret Service to shoot him to bring him down. Amid the ensuing chaos, one Secret Service member said, "Gentlemen, if that fellow we just shot was an uncommitted delegate, we're in deep trouble."²⁸⁰ This joke reflects the intense fight for each delegate by the Ford campaign before the convention. In addition to courting state conventions, the campaign courted uncommitted delegates, flying them to Washington to see the President or giving their entire family a White House meeting.²⁸¹ Through these efforts, Ford had amassed 1,102 delegates to Reagan's 1,063 by July 18, and with 94 delegates still uncommitted and some of Ford's support seeming soft, it still seemed to be anyone's nomination to win.²⁸² But with Reagan still clearly behind, it seemed that he was once again on the backfoot just as he was before North Carolina. But, just like before North Carolina, he was not going to go down without a fight.

On July 26, Reagan announced that he planned to select Pennsylvanian Senator Richard Schweiker as his running mate.²⁸³ This selection of a liberal Republican served as an attempt to appeal to moderates skeptical of Reagan as well as make a play for Pennsylvania's bloc of delegates. At the same time, however, it infuriated conservative delegates and undercut Reagan's image as Mr. Conservative.²⁸⁴ One conservative Congressman called the decision "the dumbest thing I ever heard of," and another called it like "a farmer selling his last cow to buy a milking

²⁸⁰ Cheney, *In My Time*, 88.

²⁸¹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 88.

²⁸² Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 393.

²⁸³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 394.

²⁸⁴ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 211-212.

machine.”²⁸⁵ In the immediate aftermath of this announcement, Ford’s Pennsylvanian delegates held firm and increased in number, John Connally broke his neutrality and endorsed Ford, and Mississippi, ripe soil for Reagan, broke for Ford.²⁸⁶ It may seem that Reagan made a mistake here, one that possibly lost him the nomination. However, Reagan was already behind in delegates, and this did not seem to be a deficit from which he could recover without some extraordinary event occurring.²⁸⁷ The selection of Schweiker served as their extraordinary event, serving as a form of outreach to other parts of the party. In addition to this, it also served to place pressure on Ford to announce his own running mate.²⁸⁸ Given the closeness of the race, any announcement of a running mate, especially were it to be Rockefeller or some other comparable liberal figure in the party, might change the balance.²⁸⁹ It was a gamble, relying on Ford to blink. But Ford did not blink. While the plan may have failed before the convention, Reagan endeavored to make sure it came to fruition at the convention itself.

On August 16, the Republican National Convention opened in Kansas City. Yet even as the convention opened, who would emerge victorious remained in question. Internally, Ford was projected to have 1,135 votes, just five more than needed to win, but this was heavily contested by Reagan advisors. It was tense. Reagan, attempting to force Ford to do what his Schweiker gamble had failed to do, drafted a proposal called Rule 16-C. This rule would require contenders for the presidential nomination to name their running mate in advance of the vote for the nomination.²⁹⁰ This rule, dubbed the “misery loves company” amendment, would threaten Ford’s nomination as the announcement of any running mate could upset his already narrow margin of

²⁸⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 395.

²⁸⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 394-397.

²⁸⁷ Cheney, *In My Time*, 89.

²⁸⁸ Rumsfeld, *When the Center Held*, 212.

²⁸⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 897.

²⁹⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 397.

delegates.²⁹¹ Due to this, it was treated by Ford as proxy battle for the nomination itself.²⁹² And when they prevailed on the issue 1,180 to 1,069, Ford's nomination seemed assured.²⁹³ Despite this, Reagan had one last play to make. He decided to target Ford's foreign policy.

The "Morality in Foreign Policy" proposal was a frontal attack on Ford's foreign policy for its realist actions. It commended Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for his "human courage and morality," condemned the Helsinki Agreement for "taking from those who do not have freedom the hope of one day getting it," and committed the party to a foreign policy "in which secret agreement, hidden from our people, will have no part."²⁹⁴ This platform proposal was despised by Ford, Rockefeller, and Kissinger, viewing it as an intolerable attempt to humiliate them.²⁹⁵ However, Ford's other advisors, including Cheney, told the president to concede on the issue.²⁹⁶ Reagan wanted them to fight over the platform. For if they were to fight and lose, they could lose the nomination by showing Ford's weakness.²⁹⁷ While Kissinger threatened to resign, a threat that one member of the Ford team responded to by saying he should do so "because we can use the votes," Ford decided that it would be best to concede the plank.²⁹⁸ And Rockefeller went along with this determination.²⁹⁹ Thus, the plank was adopted without a fight, conceding the foreign policy plank to the neoconservatives as it condemned the realists. But, with 16-C defeated and the foreign policy plank conceded, the way seemed clear for a Ford nomination on the first round of balloting. Still, Rockefeller hoped to prevent any further issue from coming up that might jeopardize Ford's nomination. So, he instructed New York Republican Party chairman

²⁹¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 397-398.

²⁹² Cheney, *In My Time*, 90.

²⁹³ Cheney, *In My Time*, 90; Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 399.

²⁹⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 398.

²⁹⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 398; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 897.

²⁹⁶ Cheney, *In My Time*, 91.

²⁹⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 398.

²⁹⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 398; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 897.

²⁹⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 897.

Dick Rosenbaum to make no complementary podium references to his performance as vice president since any demonstration spawned by this could hurt Ford.³⁰⁰ Having been sidelined for so long in the primary, he now denied himself recognition as the Vice President at his own party's convention.

On August 18, Ford emerged with a victory on the first ballot with 1,187 to Reagan's 1,070.³⁰¹ Ford was officially the Republican nominee for the President of the United States in 1976. All that remained at issue was who Ford's running mate would be, and this was a weighty issue. One poll conducted before the convention showed that a very large number of voters would be influenced by who he selected as his running mate, including 41% of voters under 35 years of age.³⁰² Ford's criteria for a nominee were nearly the same as they had been when he selected Rockefeller. They had to be fully qualified to be president, had to share Ford's political philosophy, and had to be someone with whom Ford was comfortable. In addition, for the sake of party harmony, they also had to be acceptable to Reagan and his delegates.³⁰³ With these criteria in mind, the search for Ford's running mate began.

Over the course of deliberations, several candidates were considered by Ford and his advisors. Discussions began by eliminating former Attorney General Elliot Richardson, one of the two men who resigned as part of the Saturday Night Massacre for their refusal to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, and Secretary of the Treasury Bill Simon from contention, the former for being too liberal and the latter for being too conservative.³⁰⁴ John Connally was then floated,

³⁰⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 898.

³⁰¹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 91.

³⁰² Robert M Teeter, "Summary of Pre-Convention Poll on Potential Vice Presidential Choices," August 16, 1976, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0027/1691415.pdf>, 2.

³⁰³ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 401.

³⁰⁴ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 401.

but polling showed him having significant negatives as well as being too polarizing.³⁰⁵ Ford then expressed an interest in former Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus, the other man who resigned alongside Richardson. However, no one else in the discussion except Rockefeller favored Ruckelshaus, especially seeing as he was one of the least known candidates among those who had been tested.³⁰⁶ Ambassador to Great Britain Anne Armstrong was then considered, a woman whose dramatic selection would shock the country. However, with polls showing that she would cost more traditional support than any other nominee, she too was dropped. Finally, there was Senator Howard Baker of Tennessee and Senator Bob Dole of Kansas. The choice between the two was very close for Ford. The two had quite comparable advantages and disadvantages with the only key difference between them being where they polled the best.³⁰⁷ While Baker polled the best by small margins in virtually every region and with every voter type, Dole had a unique appeal to the Plains states as the ranking Republican on the Senate Agricultural Committee.³⁰⁸ Believing that the farm states were crucial to victory and having been told by Reagan that Dole would be an excellent choice, he proposed Dole to the group.³⁰⁹ And, after there was no objection, Ford announced, “All right, gentlemen. It’s Dole.”³¹⁰

Rockefeller participated in the discussion of who would replace him on the ticket, offering advice to Ford on who would be best to select.³¹¹ At no point during the discussion was Rockefeller seriously considered. Although one member of the group suggested simply placing

³⁰⁵ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 402; Teeter, “Summary of Pre-Convention Poll on Potential Vice Presidential Choices,” 2.

³⁰⁶ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 402; Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 898; Teeter, “Summary of Pre-Convention Poll on Potential Vice Presidential Choices,” 3.

³⁰⁷ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 402-404.

³⁰⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 403; Teeter, “Summary of Pre-Convention Poll on Potential Vice Presidential Choices,” 2.

³⁰⁹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 400, 404.

³¹⁰ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 404.

³¹¹ Cheney, *In My Time*, 93-94.

Rockefeller back on the ticket since they had won, this serious proposal was taken as a joke.³¹² He would remain on the sidelines as he had throughout the primaries. Following the delivery of Rockefeller's muted speech before the convention hall, Dole was accepted as Ford's running mate by an overwhelming majority of delegates.³¹³ Any attempt at organized opposition failed with the proposal to draft Reagan flailing, resulting in Dole losing just 378 votes cast in protest.³¹⁴ The ticket was Ford-Dole, and Rockefeller was left in its dust.

³¹² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 898-899.

³¹³ R. W. Apple Jr., "Ford Picks Senator Dole As Running Mate; Says He Wants Debate, And Carter Agrees," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1976, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/20/archives/ford-picks-senator-dole-as-running-mate-says-he-wants-debate-and.html>.

³¹⁴ Apple Jr., "Ford Picks Senator Dole As Running Mate."

The Death of Liberal Republicanism

The 1976 campaign saw Rockefeller sidelined, mirroring his treatment during the long primary. While he remained a team player, stumping for the Ford-Dole ticket and down ballot Republicans, he was not the prominent figure he once was, facing smaller crowds, fewer reporters, and fewer hands to shake.³¹⁵ In the final days of the campaign, he suggested that he could have won the nomination, saying that Ford secured the nomination because of the support of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, delegations he insisted he would have had the support of.³¹⁶ And if he had been nominated, Rockefeller insisted he would have won.³¹⁷ Despite Rockefeller's unbridled optimism, one cannot help but dismiss these notions as mere flights of fancy. Reagan's conservative challenge to Ford, although unsuccessful in its attempt to defeat the president, was successful in its attempt to defeat Rockefeller. The challenge was first sparked by Rockefeller's past presidential campaigns, his ideology, and the actions he took in office, and it was given kindling through the application of a realist foreign policy that Rockefeller stood as one of the main proponents of. Thus, while directly challenging Ford, the nomination fight stood as an indirect challenge to Rockefeller. And over the course of their campaign, Ford, in attempting to win the nomination, was made to concede on these points. Rockefeller was dropped from the ticket, their arguments regarding the folly of détente were conceded to, and Ford was made to select a running mate in line with conservative desires. And all this time, Rockefeller stood at the sidelines, silenced and walking alone, acting as a team player rather than a leader. While Rockefeller had once shouted his points before a convention who replied in jeers, boos, and applause, the end of this campaign saw Rockefeller shouting before a convention who

³¹⁵ Martin Tolchin, "Rockefeller, Off the Bandwagon, Walks Behind as a Team Player," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1976, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/03/archives/rockefeller-off-the-bandwagon-walks-behind-as-a-team-player-in-the.html>.

³¹⁶ Tolchin, "Rockefeller, Off the Bandwagon."

³¹⁷ Tolchin, "Rockefeller, Off the Bandwagon."

did not respond to him for they could not hear him. At a low point in the 1964 campaign, Rockefeller's political operative Stuart Spencer asked Rockefeller to summon that "fabled nexus of money, power, influence, and condescension known as the Eastern Establishment." Rockefeller responded, "You're looking at it, buddy. I'm all that's left."³¹⁸ While once standing as a piece of hyperbole, Rockefeller's statement had become a reality. His political death had come. And following this primary, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller would never have another opportunity to reassert himself and his liberal republicanism. And no one from his wing of the party would ever again find a place on a Republican national ticket.

On January 27, 1979, at 12:20 a.m., Rockefeller was pronounced dead of a massive heart attack.³¹⁹ On February 2, 1979, twenty-two hundred mourners from across the political spectrum attended his funeral.³²⁰ President Jimmy Carter, Vice President Walter Mondale, Gerald Ford, forty senators, and dozens of House members were joined by the secretary-general of the United Nations and representatives from forty-four nations.³²¹ Henry Kissinger gave tribute to his departed friend, his family reflected on their time with him, and Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. offered the closing prayer.³²² Among these mourners was Barry Goldwater, slipping into a back pew during the service to pay tribute to the man with whom his long-term political rivalry had ended.³²³ With his political and physical deaths behind him, a vibraphone rendition of Rockefeller's long-time exit music of "Sweet Georgia Brown" was played by a jazz band as Rockefeller stepped from the world and into history.³²⁴

³¹⁸ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, P. pg. 10.

³¹⁹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 934.

³²⁰ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 944.

³²¹ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 944.

³²² Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 944-946.

³²³ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 945.

³²⁴ Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 946.

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