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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN. *dy*

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# The American Political Report

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## THE FORD ADMINISTRATION

Despite the worsening economic scene, Gerald Ford's job approval rating is prospering under attack from both the Congressional Left and the Reaganite Right. Most polls -- coming every 3-4 weeks -- miss the ups and downs of presidential ratings, but new Sindlinger surveys show just how much progress Ford has made. As of Feb. 19, 51% of those sampled gave Ford positive marks -- either an "excellent" or "pretty good" job rating, up from 45% on Feb. 13, 35% in late January, 33% in mid-January and just 9% in early January.

Bear in mind that this surge has come during a period in which Congress believes the public is souring on Administration inaction...But polls suggest the opposite. Sindlinger data shows that as the White House vs. 94th Congress battle has sunk into public consciousness, Ford's rating has climbed from 33% to 51% favorable while Congress's approval has stagnated at a record low 20%. We don't think this can be stated emphatically enough -- confrontation is the key to Ford's recovery. Louis Harris polls published Feb. 10 also offer some confirmation...When Harris asked people who they blame for recession, the Ford Administration came out best:

	Blame Very Much	Blame Only Some	Blame Hardly At All	Not Sure
Arab Oil Producers	63%	24%	8%	6%
Major Companies	50	36	8	6
Congress	48	37	8	7
Labor Unions	39	38	16	7
Ford Administration	20	37	34	8

Elite media cartoonists may draw Gerald Ford in the high collars of Herbert Hoover, but the voters see Congress as the economic bogeyman. Here's a caveat, though: the economy is going to get worse, and as it does, the strains within the GOP will worsen. The 1976 threat to the Ford Administration lies on the Right, not on the Left.

In this connection, watch Nelson Rockefeller. He is taking over as "domestic Kissinger," operating almost as if Ford didn't exist. His successful power play for control of the Domestic Council made even liberal columnist Joe Kraft characterize Ford as a "patsy," and Rockefeller's surprise alliance with Senate liberals on the Rule 22 (filibuster) ruling has Capitol Hill Republicans bitterly speculating that the President is either a fool or something less than master in his own house. Just before Rockefeller ruled with the liberals, White House Senate liaisonman Bill Kendall assured conservative GOP Senators that the Administration knew what was at stake, and that Rockefeller would rule in favor of the conservative pro-filibuster position. Rockefeller's escalating power

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is the No. 1 factor goading conservatives towards an open revolt.

At the same time, the Feb. 13-16 Conservative Political Action Conference showed how divided the conservatives are (see Special Survey). Even if Gerald Ford is not much more than an honest ceremonial "nice guy" figure, he's making a strong recovery from January lows, and runs far ahead of Ronald Reagan in GOP presidential preference polls. As we understand it, the newly formed conservative political steering group will decide on its course -- GOP challenge or third-party -- by August or September.

#### THE IMPERIAL SENATE

It's worth keeping a close eye on the Senate, especially now that the filibuster barrier may be breaking down. We predict that -- as part of the 1976 come-uppance awaiting Congress -- the privileges and prerogatives of the Senate are going to come under increasing fire.

Two hundred years ago, some Constitutional framers worried about what is now called "The Imperial Presidency" while others worried about a self-perpetuating aristocracy in the Senate. As of 1975, the Imperial Presidency has been Englished-muffined, but the "Imperial Senate" (akin to the "Senatorial Class" that helped erode the Roman Republic) is coming up to the firing line. By 1976, we think they'll be spotlighted -- and in trouble.

Our surmise: Articles in the Washington Post, The New Republic and elsewhere detailing the mammoth growth of Senate staff structures and the use of these staffs and committee field hearings for home state politicking are just the beginning. By smart application of taxpayer money to give virtually every majority Senator with 3-4 years of service his own committee or subcommittee, the Senate is turning itself into a self-perpetuating political aristocracy. Looking back at Senate elections during the last 10 years, over 80 Democratic incumbents have sought another term in November, and we count only five Democratic incumbents having lost 1966-74 general elections. The Democratic Senate Campaign Committee wastes no time in telling new Senators how to use the machinery to insure re-election, and they've been quite successful.

Now that the Senate is proliferating its staff with such runaway ambition, look for conservatives to pick up on the theme of huge staffs abused for personal politicking and on the idea of a self-perpetuating aristocracy whose members thrive on presidential ambition. Blocking a chairman from using his committee or subcommittee staffers for political purposes would be the same as denying him a whopping chunk of cash, and it's the sort of thing good government groups can be harnessed to support. Besides, the theme of a self-perpetuating, presidency-hungering "Senatorial Class" ought to be very appealing to the populist element -- especially as a half-dozen of the Senators will be ignoring Washington business to campaign in the 1976 primaries.

Falling filibuster barriers may spur the Senate to produce unprecedentedly radical measures just at a time when Congressional ratings have never been lower -- or institutional vulnerabilities higher. All in all, we keep becoming more and more convinced that it's Congress and not the Executive Branch that's heading for the big fall in the next few years -- and this is a potential problem not only for the Democratic Party but for the "Senatorial Class" who constitute the principal bloc of Democratic presidential contenders.

#### ENERGY POLITICS CONFUSION

We don't see how either the Ford Administration or Congress can put through an effective energy program -- and nobody can rely on their doing so -- until public confusion is dissipated. From our polls and political analyses, we think that the key for the Administration lies with high-level (probably major TV address) presidential presentation of facts on the severity and implications of the energy crunch. Short of this, it's hard to see how either legislative or public confusion can be overcome. Here's why:

1) Public Bewilderment: According to new Phillips-Sindlinger survey data for Feb. 11-16, most people are not yet affected by the energy shortage (17% mentioned industrial gas shortages, but only 3% were having trouble getting gasoline locally). So far, most of the impact comes from the price of fuel and electricity, which has people confused as to whether or not there is really much shortage. Many say there is no shortage or blame it on the oil industry or OPEC. At the same time, there is no agreement on remedies. Here is Phillips-Sindlinger Survey data on the energy solutions preferred by the public: conserving fuel and energy (26%), developing individual energy sources (21%), stopping oil companies from making big profits (12%), rationing (9%), taxing gas usage (6%), rolling back prices or instituting controls (6%), curtailing oil imports (2%), and making a private deal with the Arabs (2%). But at the same time, 10% said they didn't understand whether there was or wasn't a problem, 7% said they didn't know what to do, 2% said there was nothing we could do, and 6% said get politics out of energy policy. This is a portrait of frustration...of a public feeling that second-rate politicians don't know or won't say what's going on.

2) Political Party Confusion: Democratic spokesmen can agree on opposing the White House, but not on very much else. Meanwhile, Republican Party officials repeat what we said in paragraph 1 -- that people are confused and that the Administration has not made its case. Godfrey Sperling, in the Feb. 19 Christian Science Monitor, sampled GOP state chairmen and found them consistently saying that people didn't know what to think -- is there a crisis or not? What they wanted from the White House was candor and consistency about the seriousness of the economic and energy crisis. Until this is forthcoming, bet on policymaking confusion.

#### A PERSONAL NOTE

In the last few weeks, we have had some inquiry about two new books by APR editor Kevin Phillips. Here are the details.

The first, entitled "Electoral Reform and Voter Participation," will be published in March as an AEI-Hoover Institution policy study (co-authored by Paul Blackman). Its focus is on voter participation and the impact of reform legislation on turnout, with special emphasis on postcard registration proposals. Using foreign and state-level comparisons, the book documents how voter malaise rather than the burden of registration is primarily responsible for low U.S. turnout.

The second, entitled "Mediocracy: American Parties and Politics in the Communications Age" will be published by Doubleday on April 18. Among other things, it suggests that the Communications Revolution is creating a new elite and making the existing party structure obsolete much as the Industrial Revolution did in the 1820-60 period. A supporting editorial in the upcoming National Review says "the appearance of this book will be a major political event, and will provide a focus for serious political discussion." Publishers Weekly says "the book should generate lots of wounded outcries." When they are out, we'll provide information for ordering copies.

## PROSPECTS FOR A CONSERVATIVE PARTY (CONT'D)

Right now, we don't think that Reagan is viable within the GOP presidential framework...moreover, if things are so bad that he can win the primaries, what will the GOP nomination be worth in the election? These prospects could push Reagan back into non-candidacy or a third party strategy by fall or winter. If not, he could fumble badly in the primaries, which could shift the third party spotlight to George Wallace. Overall, we're inclined to think that Reagan lacks the personal commitment to go all the way in 1976.

5. The Wallace Option: Aside from the Reagan-Buckley-ACU leadership cadre, quite a few of the CPAC delegates were pro-Wallace or willing to play with the Wallace third-party idea. Univ. of Missouri Prof. Thomas Ireland, brought in for the third-party mechanics panel, downplayed Reagan and suggested that the new ticket able to win a 3-way race against a liberal Democrat and a GOP pairing including Rockefeller should be headed by Wallace with a conservative GOP Senator or Governor as runningmate. Ireland suggested Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada, a Roman Catholic of French-Basque ancestry. Such a new party would be conservative in social positions, but moderate in economics and careful to shun peripheral issues. Wallace is openly admitting that he might go third party, and APR's estimate is that he has a better grasp than Reagan of both the economics and reviving social issue needed for 1976. But whether Wallace can surmount his background to put together the coalition sketched by Ireland remains conjectural...there's no evidence yet that he can. In Wallace's favor, though, is the changing tenor of rank-and-file conservatism towards the Wallace brand and away from the "Old Right" variety.

6. Business and a Conservative Party: Don't be convinced by NYTimes editorials saying there can be no new conservative party because business is happy with Ford -- and business is the base of conservative parties in industrial societies. The U.S. simply isn't an industrial society any more...it's a post-industrial society where the production and distribution of knowledge and services has moved ahead of manufacturing as a percentage of the GNP. In the 3 leading post-industrial societies around the world -- Sweden, U.S. and Canada -- old-line business is no longer important enough to provide the base of a national majority party. Sweden's business is politically impotent, Canada's is split between the Conservatives and the Liberals (with the Conservatives becoming increasingly Prairie Populist) and U.S. business is also politically divided and not reliably conservative in the old style. So don't look to business to see whether there will or won't be a third party because it won't come from them, although some will go along if the economic crunch gets brutal. Realistically, the New York-Washington Establishment is now Knowledge Industry liberal, not Manufacturing Industry conservative, and opposition to the new liberal Eastern Establishment is shaping the new populist, anti-establishment nature of "conservatism." This changing conservatism seems unable to root itself in the shrinking old middle-class framework of the GOP, and any new "Conservative Party" will draw most of its impetus from the populist conservative element -- old style elite conservatism will be subordinate. In APR's opinion, this basic socio-economic shift -- as important as the Industrial Revolution was more than a century ago -- also explains why a new third party can succeed. The period of third-party failure (from the 1870's until recently) was the time during which the Republican and Democratic parties had an industrial-era logic. Now that the industrial era is over, we see new parties succeeding just as they did in the 1820-1860 period of early industrial era flux, albeit they will be much less deep-rooted in nature.