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The Ford-Halleck Race 1964-1965

No one individual knows "history;" all any one participant can know is that portion -- that slice -- that he saw and lived through. Even then memories are imperfect and no one sees all 360°.

My personal recollection of the Ford-Halleck race was something like this;

In November, 1964, after Senator Barry Goldwater was defeated by President Lyndon Johnson in a landslide, Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives were reduced to a low of 140 of the 435 Members of Congress. There were so many Democrats that some had to sit in the Republican side of the aisle.

The day after the defeat, I called Congressman Tom Curtis of Missouri to talk about what we ought to do about that sad state of affairs in our party. I suggested we meet in Washington, D.C. and consider having a GOP Conference in December, instead of waiting for the January Conference, and that we be prepared to make some proposals as to how the Republican minority in the Congress could better function. Tom and I met with Bob Griffin, Charlie Goodell, Al Quie and somewhat later, with Bob Ellsworth and others. Initially, we did not meet with the intention of challenging Charlie Halleck.

Discussions took place about various possible reforms. At some point, because Charlie Halleck was reacting so negatively to our idea of a GOP Conference we began to discuss challenging the leadership and who might be able to defeat Halleck. After a great deal of discussion, a group of us concluded that Jerry Ford was the best person to run against Halleck for Minority Leader.

Our small group began to talk to others. We met with Gerald Ford to see if he would be willing to run. He did not leap at the idea. At a certain point, as support grew, the effort began to gel, and Ford agreed to run.

I recall a meeting in Ford's office at a decision point when I wrote the first draft of an announcement telegram for him to send to the 140 surviving Republican members of the House indicating his intention to run. I also prepared questions and answers for his announcement press conference.

As the campaign proceeded, Bob Griffin, Charlie Goodell, Al Quie and I, and at various times others, were involved in coordinating the campaign. As we moved towards the date for the vote in January, I kept the tabulation of where we believed each of the 140 Republican members stood on the Ford-Halleck race.



The tabulation reflected the judgments of the 5 to 7 key Ford supporters as to where each Republican Member stood: "For Ford," "Leaning Ford," "Undecided," "Unknown," "Leaning Halleck," or "Halleck."

Each day we assigned ourselves Members to talk to and tried to refine the count. During the final hours we each had assignments. In the final minutes, we each were assigned a seat next to a Member to try to persuade. My assignment was to sit next to Don Clancy of Ohio to make a final pitch.

The Ohio delegate was by instinct in the Halleck camp, except for the fact that if Halleck lost Ford would move off the Appropriations Committee and Frank Bow of Ohio would become ranking member on the Appropriations Committee. That was enormously attractive to Frank Bow as well as to other members of the Ohio delegation, so we worked the delegation hard.

The vote was taken in the House Ways and Means Committee meeting room. It was the old days when the female members of Congress were asked to tabulate the votes. Two or three of them were in the front of the room. As I recall, the vote counters were Charlotte Reid, Catherine May and Catherine St. George. Each Member walked up to the front of the room and dropped their ballot in a box. When the ladies had counted the ballots, they announced that there were one or two more votes cast than there were people in the room. One member was missing, so there were 139 eligible to vote, but there were 140 or 141 votes and Halleck was ahead.

We agreed quickly that there would be another ballot and that no one would mention to the press that someone voted more than their one vote.

When the final vote was counted, Gerald Ford won by one or two votes.

Attached is the master tabulation kept for the Ford team in that critical Ford-Halleck election.

Had Ford lost to Halleck, he very likely would not have been selected as President Nixon's V.P. when Agnew had to resign. And, had Ford not been Vice President, he most assuredly would not have been President of the United States.

Attachments
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