P.S. to the NEWS
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IT'S A LONG, LONG TIME FROM NOW TO NOVEMBER

One of the country's most successful consumer products was built from scratch into a multi-million dollar business by a smart entrepreneur who hired people to go to drug stores and ask them to put a supply of the item on their shelves without any obligation. If the items sold, the drugstores could then order on regular terms.

I remember the businessman commenting on the employees as they came back for more samples saying, "This is easy! I didn't realize I am such a good salesman!" The fact was that they hadn't sold anything -- they had simply given merchandise away.

I fear that a similar false pride has arisen in the minds of those who are running Ronald Reagan's campaign. They think their skill has won the Republican nomination and that they can coast downhill to victory in the November election.

Alas, it will not be that easy. In the first place, Reagan had such a tremendous headstart in the contest for the Republican nomination that it would have been difficult for him to lose it. In the second place, the campaign for election in November is an entirely different kind of race.

Many people are questioning whether Reagan or his staff have the strategy, the skill, or the stamina to defeat Jimmy Carter. The same strategy and the same speeches that won in July won't win in November.

Carter is politically tough, and if he wavers or weakens he will be bolstered by Rosalynn who is even tougher. Carter talks out of both sides of his mouth -- on defense, on abortion, on the economy.

The most recent example of hypocrisy was telling the sailors on an aircraft carrier that he would give them the new benefits they deserve -- after his Administration had been strenuously lobbying on Capitol Hill to delete those very benefits from the military budget.

Carter has all the preeminent advantages of White House incumbency. He knows how to use them and has the will to use them in a way that Gerald Ford could not or would

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not. Carter can outmaneuver Reagan by control of federal funds, such as the payments he made to Michigan shortly before the primary, and by government publicity.

Carter will be the beneficiary of powerful groups which, although not especially keen on Carter, would nevertheless prefer him to Reagan with whom they are uncomfortable. The resignations of Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon, and their replacement by Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller, are only a few of the many events which prove that the media exercise more control over who is President than the democratic election process.

How will Reagan cope with the accelerating efforts of some of the media to give John Anderson so much support and free publicity that he prevents either Carter or Reagan from winning an electoral majority, and the election is thrown into the House where anything can happen?

What will Reagan's strategy be, for example, if Khomeini releases all the American hostages a week before the November election, and the newspapers and TV screens are filled with dramatic pictures of Carter welcoming their return? His year of mistakes will be buried under the happy tear-jerker of an election-eve coup.

What will Reagan's strategy be if Carter's Federal Reserve friends slash interest rates just in time to cause a pre-election boom in construction and factory hirings? What will Reagan's strategy be if Brezhnev decides to give Carter a sham victory the week before the election, such as pulling the 3,000 Soviet combat troops out of Cuba (temporarily, of course), or announcing a withdrawal from Afghanistan?

The liberal Republicans are trying to force on Reagan a campaign strategy aimed at appeasing Republican liberals, especially in the northeast. But there are millions more votes available to Reagan from among Democrats, independents and those who did not vote in 1976.

By twice being elected Governor of California (where Democrats greatly outnumber Republicans), and by winning three out of four primaries, Reagan has proved he can attract non-Republican voters. He should not be pushed into a strategy which would alienate these potential voters in a futile attempt to win Republican liberals who will probably end up supporting John Anderson anyway.

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