

AMERICUS, Ga. (AP) — President Ford's challenge to a presidential campaign debate upstaged Jimmy Carter and caught the Democratic nominee and his staff by surprise.

The words 'face-to-face' debate were hardly out of Ford's mouth when Carter's press secretary rounded up reporters to say his candidate, too, was ready to debate — a decision that could produce the first such

presidential campaign encounter since John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon met in 1960 in a series of four nationally televised debates.

Ford made his challenge Thursday night in his SS nomination acceptance speech to the Republican National Convention and a national television audience

"I am ready and eager," he told the delegates, "to go before the American people and debate Jimmy Carter. The people have a right to know where we stand."

SS :

The debate challenge was not in the advance text of Ford's speech

White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen said Ford had been considering issuing the challenge for the past 10 days. He said it was left out of the advance text of the speech because Ford wanted to save it as a surprise for the delegates.

Carter press secretary Jody Powell relayed Carter's advance — what Carter people called his "counter challenge" — to fewer than a dozen reporters watching Ford deliver his speech on a television set beside a motel swimming pool.

His staff had scurried from room to room searching for newspaper, wire service and television reporters. Powell read the only available copy of the Carter

Statement

It wasn't supposed to happen that way. Carter had intended to issue his own debate challenge to Ford today at a 9 a.m. news conference in a carefully orchestrated response to the week-long GOP convention

But he decided to release his prepared statement as soon as he learned of Ford's decision from television commentators, who reported shortly before Ford gave his speech that he would issue the debate challenge

Kansas Sen. Robert Dole, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, visited Hamilton in 1972. Journal-News writer Ron Reed rounded up points of interest about that visit and Dole's profile in a story on today's page 5.

The last bit of confetti has been thrown, now the Republicans look toward campaigning. Stories on those last hours in Kansas and the first hours on the campaign trail appear on page 3.

Carter and his wife, Rosalyn, watched the Ford show Thursday night in their home on the outskirts of nearby Plains.

Carter's red text said he will do his best to use normal campaign methods — speeches, press releases and advertising — 'to be sure the American people understand my hopes and plans.

He a single debate or series of debates, and said, "In the interest of an informed choice for the American people, I believe the candidates have an obligation to meet in debate before the people of this country."

Carter said he does not believe choosing a debate format will be any problem, although he said he has not committed himself to any of the debate proposals he had previously received