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READING NEW YORK

Apocalypse Forever, A Sharp-Eyed Insider And a Pointed Pen

By SAM ROBERTS

You don't have to know Richard M. Rosenbaum to thoroughly enjoy his charming memoir and political primer, "No Room for Democracy: The Triumph of Ego Over Common Sense" (RIT Press, \$27.95). You don't even have to like him, although nearly everyone does.

Mr. Rosenbaum, a former State Supreme Court justice, was New York's gregarious Republican state chairman and a national committee member during the governorship and vice presidency of Nelson Rockefeller, as well as a gubernatorial candidate himself.

He's at his best recounting the nuts and bolts (there were plenty of both) of local politics. His advice includes "If you want to get into politics, make sure you can count" and "There is no room for democracy in politics."

But the discerning reader is left wanting even more detail on matters like why Mr. Rockefeller disliked Jacob Javits, the state's senior senator (ego over common sense); which political insider was the middleman in a possible bribery scheme; and the risks of crossing the Rockefeller family and the power that family wielded.

Mr. Rosenbaum recalls flying over South Dakota on Mr. Rockefeller's private jet in 1974, eager to see Mount Rushmore, but disappointed when the plane arrived after dark. Mr. Rockefeller left his seat briefly, and by the time he returned, the monument was bathed in floodlights. "One of the most powerful men in the country," Mr. Rosenbaum remembered, "had just worked a miracle of sorts for my pleasure."

Although the presidency was one miracle that remained elusive to Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Rosenbaum did help him become vice president. And Mr. Rosenbaum shares Mr. Rockefeller's thinking on the merits of that office. "I have known well all the vice presidents since Henry Wallace," Mr. Rockefeller wrote to Mr. Rosenbaum in 1979, "and I think it is fair to say that all of them were frustrated."