



Rowland Evans and Robert Novak



Mitchell Will Be Missed

WHILE JOHN MITCHELL was privately informing President Nixon last Friday that he could not continue as his campaign manager, the impact of that decision was brought home by a speech distributed by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's office.

In the bludgeoning style he has perfected these past four years, Agnew's speech eviscerated Sen. George McGovern as a "fraud" and a "radical" who is "repugnant to the tradition of a free people." Mitchell had determined that Agnew definitely should not unleash such overkill but, in his recent personal torment, had no opportunity to so inform the Vice President. Now, in his new, indistinct role as a part-time adviser to the campaign, Mitchell may never really impose this restriction on Agnew.

That is a principal reason why thoughtful Republicans around the country are so dismayed by Mitchell's departure and desperately hope he maintains behind-the-scenes power. If not, who can muzzle Agnew in the campaign against McGovern? Beyond that, who can curb Mr. Nixon himself? Behind these questions is

the gnawing fear among Republicans that their golden opportunity this year could be lost by rhetorical excesses such as Agnew's anti-McGovern tirade. Republican strategists now believe McGovern will reflexively mouth left-wing clichés just as Barry Goldwater destroyed himself with instinctive right-wing rhetoric in 1964. McGovern's almost unbelievable declarations last week that "begging is better than bombing" and that Mr. Nixon's Indochina bombing policy compares with Hitler's genocide, these strategists deem, are sufficiently self-destructive without embellishment from Agnew or anybody else.

In fact, almost everybody in top-level Republican politics understands this—everybody, that is, except Ted Agnew. Though it strains the outside world's credulity, the Vice President is a free agent. His rhetorical onslaughts (including last Friday's against McGovern) are not cleared by the White House and occasionally contradict recommendations of presidential aides. Mr. Nixon, disliking confrontations, cannot be imagined laying down the law to his Vice President even though

he is increasingly disturbed by Agnew's outbursts.

That was the role for Mitchell, who has regularly performed unpleasant chores for Mr. Nixon. Considered Agnew's most enthusiastic booster in the Nixon inner circle and an advocate of his renomination for Vice President, Mitchell is considered the only man capable of muzzling him.

SIMILARLY, Mitchell is the only campaign manager in Mr. Nixon's 26 years of electoral politics capable of restraining him.

This view, that Mr. Nixon is an excellent President but an atrocious campaigner, is held throughout the White House. But the President, obeying his own irresistible yearning for the campaign trail and heeding pleas from local candidates anxious for help, may well abandon the Oval Office for balloon-filled rallies without dour John Mitchell there to restrain him.

Mitchell's successor, former Rep. Clark MacGregor of Minnesota, has no license to lecture either the Presi-

dent or Vice President. His standing in the Nixon apparatus derives from sponsorship by Mitchell, who recommended him last year as chief White House lobbyist and last week as campaign manager.

Moreover MacGregor must start from scratch in building relationships with state party leaders.

Nor will MacGregor inherit a going operation at the luxuriously furnished Nixon re-election headquarters catty-corner from the White House.

Finally, there is MacGregor's relationship with the senior White House staff, particularly the powerful H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Even Mitchell had trouble maintaining an autonomous campaign free from White House staff interference. MacGregor's relationship with the senior staffers, though warmer than Mitchell's, is now one of a subordinate. That worries state party leaders, who have a low esteem for the Haldeman-Ehrlichman political wisdom.

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