

Mitchell Gearing Up To Steer Campaign

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For some time now, the steady hand of Attorney General John N. Mitchell has been in control of national Republican politics, even though President Nixon's 1968 campaign manager may wait a while before officially severing his connection with the Justice Department.

For months, Mitchell has been intimately involved in gearing up for the 1972 presidential campaign. He helped select top officials and has enunciated political policy for both the Republican National Committee and the Committee for the Reelection of the President.

In addition he has shuffled his heavy workload to

consult and advise Republican leaders from around the country whose problems were big enough to be unresolvable by regular administration political operatives.

White House sources contend that President Nixon is responsible for Mitchell's continuing political role and the certainty of belief inside the administration that in late January or early February, Mitchell will don his hat as the President's personal campaign manager.

"I've heard the President many times address a political problem by saying, 'Check it with John,' or 'Have you talked to John about this?'" a White House official said.

See MITCHELL, A2, Col. 1

MITCHELL, From A1

"That is not to say that Mitchell is involved in the nuts and bolts of the political operation. He is not. But I think it would be fair to say that below the President, no policy or guideline involving politics goes into effect without Mitchell's approval."

Nothing better illustrates Mitchell's status in administration politics than last week's trip to California. Wearing his Attorney General hat, Mitchell dedicated a police monument and addressed the graduating class of the Los Angeles Police Academy.

Switching into his role as a partisan administration official before the Republican State Central Committee, Mitchell attacked Democratic Sens. Edward M. Kennedy and Vance Hartke for engaging in "gutter" politics.

Both of the speeches were reported, and some observers thought it significant that Mitchell was the person who kicked off the 1972 pres-

idential campaign in the President's home state.

Another Role

However, Mitchell's political role in the administration is more surely indicated by a meeting with California state officials that was not disclosed to the public.

The participants were Mitchell, presidential counselor Robert H. Finch, Gov. Ronald Reagan and all top elected GOP state officials except state Controller Houston Flournoy.

In the closed meeting, Mitchell sought a commitment from the Californians, including Finch, that they would stop jockeying and maneuvering to advance their own political careers until after the 1972 presidential election.

According to administration sources, Mitchell bluntly told them that if

they didn't hold their own ambitions in check and form ranks behind the President, no manner of maneuvering could help them in the wake of the political disaster that would follow the defeat of President Nixon.

Mitchell reportedly reminded the state officials that the nearest election in which they could run will be in 1974 and that the time for them to campaign was after the presidential election. The state officials gave Mitchell their word that they would back the President.

The Attorney General also was said to have extended Mr. Nixon's invitation to Gov. Reagan that the 1968 challenger for the presidential nomination head next year's California delegation to the Republican National Convention.

Reagan later announced that he would be a Nixon man in 1972. Going further, he said that final approval of delegates "will be in the President's hands."

"The situation (in California) was getting messy," a White House source said. "Mitchell's role is that of a unifying force. I don't know of anyone else who could have handled it."

He's Sensitive

The usually unflappable Mitchell is sensitive about

participation in presidential politics, refusing even to acknowledge a role. This probably grows out of a challenge by Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.C.) at Mitchell's Jan. 14, 1969, confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"To my mind, there is something incompatible with marrying the function of the chief political adviser and chief agitator with that of prosecutor of crimes against the government," Ervin told the ex-manager of the Nixon campaign.

Mitchell's firm reply de-



JOHN MITCHELL
... the peacemaker

fused the challenge: "Senator, I would hope that my activities of a political nature have ended with the campaign. I might say that this was my first entry into a political campaign, and I trust it will be my last. From the termination of the campaign and henceforth, my duties and functions will be related to the Justice Department, and as the legal and not the political adviser of the President."

His admirers inside the administration contend that Mitchell's actions, contrary to his statement, can be traced to the fact that he is deeply involved in politics on instructions from President Nixon.

"Mitchell is the President's friend, his adviser, and loyal to a degree you wouldn't believe," said one White House source. "The contradiction you point out

is valid, but Mitchell will take the heat and never think twice about it."

Sen. Robert Dole, chairman of the Republican National Committee, acknowledged in an interview that he "consults" with Mitchell as well as President Nixon regularly. Dole, almost continuously on the road with speaking engagements, said he reports on the GOP pulse and tries to identify potential trouble spots.

"As I look around the table and see who's going to make the decisions, I see the President, Mitchell and (H. R.) Halderman," Dole said. Halderman, who played a key role in the 1968 campaign, is an assistant to the President.

Mitchell's Choice

The operating head of the national committee is Thomas B. Evans Jr., national committeeman from Delaware, who was Mitchell's choice as co-chairman.

Although the number of telephone calls and visits with Mitchell at the Justice Department have declined in recent weeks, Evans, for a long period during the summer, was in frequent "consultation" with the Attorney General.

Sources inside the party and the administration said Mitchell helped divide the responsibilities and areas of jurisdiction between the national committee and the Committee for the Re-election of the President, expected to be the vehicle for the President's personal campaign.

Although details could not be learned, sources said Mitchell played a considerable role in defining the fund-raising efforts of the two groups. "Although there is some overlapping, each group pretty well knows the persons and groups from which it should solicit," a source said.

One of the more important decisions was placing with the Committee for the Re-election of the President responsibility for wooing the 11 million voters in the 18 to 21-year-old age bracket who will be eligible to vote for President for the first time next year.

The youth vote has frightened Republican strategists from the outset because it was assumed their registration would be heavily Democratic. A study of the youth vote has been incorporated in a group of "planning studies" on all aspects of the GOP national convention, research, fund raising, campaign techniques to reach various voting blocs are included in the studies. White House sources said that while reports on these top-national campaign.

Strategy planning for the ics are distributed to various Nixon specialists, "the man"—Mitchell—gets the bulk of them.

The Workers

Former White House staffers Harry S. Flemming and Jeb S. Magruder are in charge of the Nixon committee. Flemming, who formerly handled White House patronage, does the committee's political work, Magruder, who was deputy director of communications for the executive branch, is in charge of administration.

Magruder reportedly was handpicked by Mitchell for his post.

The committee was formed early this year in the wake of a presidential decision to disassociate the White House from operational politics, a move that saw the exodus of political operative Murray Chotiner, one of Mr. Nixon's longest associates in the business of politics.

Despite a move from the East Wing of the White House to the Executive Office Building, South Carolinian Harry Dent remained to deal with an overflow of political matters from the state and local level.

"When I get a call from a Republican leader with a problem," said one White House staffer, "I refer it to Dent if it is usual. If it is unusual, I tell the person to contact the Attorney General."

Despite widespread belief that Mitchell will take the campaign reins soon, there is sentiment inside the White House for him to remain Attorney General, even if he has to fill only a policy role in next year's campaign.

Persons expressing this sentiment divide it into two parts. First, on the campaign aspect, they contend that Mitchell's political forte, objectivity, is better served above the thousands of details that make up a political campaign. "He could do what he is doing now, making broad policy and sort of keeping an overall eye on the situation."

The Judgment

The second part involves Mitchell's clout as Attorney General and his close relationship with the President. "He has such good judgment and plays such an intricate role in the whole spectrum of presidential decisions that the loss will be felt all over the executive branch," one source said. "When he takes over the campaign, there will be a void that could be greater than anyone thinks."

Other White House aides contend that it would be political suicide, not to mention physically killing, for Mitchell to try to do both things. "We'd be open to all kinds of charges," said one staffer.

"What would happen the first time the Justice Department prosecuted a Democratic politician?"

Mitchell himself has said that he would not fill both jobs at the same time. He has also said that he will not volunteer to run the campaign, and that President Nixon hasn't ask him to do so.

But is is clear that he is doing, and will do, whatever the President requires.