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# Mr. Nixon's New Political Counselor

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There was a time, midway through the first Nixon administration, when a number of gentlemen who had not quite worked out in their first assignments were elevated almost simultaneously to the rank of presidential counselor. Someone made the crack that the White House was acquiring so many counselors it was beginning to look like a summer camp.

Today, there's only one full-time, resident counselor. Cabinet secretaries Butz, Lynn and Weinberger double in brass as counselors on natural resources, community development and human resources, but they're not housed on the premises.

The one resident counselor, strategically situated in a second-floor, west wing office between John Ehrlichman's and Roy Ash's, is just about the opposite of everything the stereotyped Nixon aide is supposed to be.

For one thing, this counselor is a she—Anne Armstrong, picked by Mr. Nixon last January as the first woman to enjoy Cabinet-level status in his administration.

For another, she is a politician to her manicured fingertips, a product of Texas Republican politics and, most recently, co-chairman of the Republican National Committee. Not for her the haughty disdain the White House agents are supposed to exhibit toward those grubby people, like senators, representatives and party workers, who labor in politics at lower-than-Oval Office levels. She has been there herself, which is more than many of her White House co-workers can say.

Third, in a building whose occupants are noted for their aloofness, Anne Armstrong is consistently in touch with the outer world, bringing draughts of realism to the ingrown discussions that abound in that place.

Add to that the fact that the lady in question happens to be smart as a whip, and her presence in the White House becomes something of a bright spot in an otherwise gray area.

Mrs. Armstrong is savvy enough to know that her elevated position is viewed with skepticism by a good many people, who figure that hers was a token appointment, designed to fend off criticism from women who, as usual, saw none of their sex chosen for

major Cabinet positions.

But she's been given a variety of assignments and keeps a staff of six professionals busy working on projects, ranging from lobbying for the ratification of the equal rights amendment, to providing White House liaison with the bicentennial commission. She is also charged with the duty of spurring government hiring of women and the Spanish-speaking, maintaining White House ties with Republican party workers and helping sell the President's New Federalism and budget philosophy to the public.

A member of both the cost-of-living council and the domestic council, Mrs. Armstrong is due to inherit the chairmanship of the property review board, which handles the disposal of surplus government land holdings, when that function is spun off from the Office of Emergency Preparedness.

In a typical four-day period recently, she spoke to a symposium on the status of women at Southern Methodist University, addressed the textile manufacturers in San Francisco, keynoted a Boston Federal Regional Council budget briefing for New England local officials, and rushed back to Washington in time for an hour's huddle with her old Texas chum, party chairman George Bush, and played hostess at a White House reception for visiting southern GOP state chairmen and Dixie Republicans in Congress.

All that's could, of course, be regarded as busywork, a way of keeping Mrs. Armstrong from her main task, which is to provide counsel to the President, he would not get from other sources.

There have been some embarrassing incidents to indicate that she is not yet a presidential confidante, including a speech to the Southwest Cattle Raisers Assn., just a week before the meat price freeze, in which she confidently assured them no such action was contemplated.

But Mrs. Armstrong insists that her travels are helpful to her role as a counselor and says, "I have had no trouble getting my messages through."

In an interview the other day, she commented, "I think being a woman is a help in this job, not a deterrent. I've heard those stories about the top staff here not wanting women in politics. I find the contrary. I think they want me to succeed."

Mrs. Armstrong has been able to enlist help from the vaunted H.R. (Bob) Haldeman himself in some of those battles for office space and staff whose outcome is watched so closely by White House insiders. Some of the veterans on the staff think Haldeman will be on her side just because—and only as long as—he regards her as no real threat to his own influence with the President.

It is, of course, impossible for anyone outside the White House to judge what reliance Mr. Nixon puts on his counselor's judgment.

But is not impossible to say what many Republicans, male and female, hope. "She's got more political sense than anyone else I know on that staff," said one party official, who sometimes shakes his head in wonder at the way most of Mr. Nixon's male operatives view the outside world. "I sure hope the President is listening to her."