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Lawyer, 36, Is Liaison for 2 Presidents

By PHILIP SHABECOFF
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 8—Ben-ton L. Becker, the young lawyer who acted as intermediary between President Ford and former President Richard M. Nixon in the negotiations that led to today's pardon announcement, was described by a former colleague in the Justice Department as "a real wheeler-dealer."

The White House counsel, Philip W. Buchen, who along with Mr. Ford sent Mr. Becker to San Clemente with an offer of pardon for Mr. Nixon, described him as "a very savvy guy whose loyalty belongs to the oval office."

But most of Mr. Becker's professional associates reached today expressed surprise that this relatively obscure lawyer, who has come into public notice recently as an attorney connected with a couple of fraud cases in the Washington area, should emerge as a participant in a historical moment.

Mr. Becker said in a telephone interview that he had found it "a humbling experience to be on the East Coast talking to one President and 12 hours later be on the West Coast talking to another."

Mr. Becker, a 36-year-old Washington lawyer, is well connected within the White House. He is a close friend of Mr. Ford, having known him for the last five years.

The two men became acquainted when Mr. Ford was minority leader of the House and Mr. Becker was on the staff of the House Judiciary Committee, helping to prepare what proved to be an abortive impeachment case against Associate Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

On Transition Staff

When Mr. Ford was nominated by President Nixon to be Vice President last winter, Mr. Becker helped Mr. Ford prepare for his confirmation hearings. More recently, he has been working on the White House transition staff, helping

the President take over the administration of government.

Mr. Becker is also a law partner of William Cramer, a former Congressman who has been close to Mr. Ford since their days in the House.

It turns out that Mr. Becker is also well connected to Mr. Nixon's lawyer, Herbert J. Miller. Both represented defendants in a case involving a Washington company that was found guilty of defrauding impoverished slum dwellers.

Mr. Becker said today that both he and Mr. Miller had since been working hard administering a fund to repay the inner city dwellers the losses they suffered from dealings with the Monarch Company, the concern involved.

Pardon in His Briefcase

Mr. Buchen, who is also a long-time friend of Mr. Becker, asked him to help on the research that led to the drafting of the pardon for Mr. Nixon. After meeting with Mr. Ford, Mr. Becker flew last Thursday to the West Coast, with the proposed pardon in his briefcase.

"As you know," he explained today, "a pardon has to be accepted after it is offered."

In San Clemente he met with Mr. Miller and Ronald L. Ziegler, the former White House press secretary and Mr. Nixon's close confidant.

After presenting the pardon offer to Mr. Nixon, Mr. Becker said he came away feeling the former President "was a man who might get some peace out of this act. He seemed to me to be a man in need of peace."

Mr. Becker said he was proud of his role in this transaction and quoted Alexander Hamilton: "A timely offer of pardon can offer tranquility to the Commonwealth."

Mr. Becker, while serving in the Justice Department as an Assistant Attorney General, worked on a criminal case against the late Adam Clayton Powell, the long-time Harlem Congressman.

Mr. Becker, in private practice, represented Joel Kline and Eric Baer, defendants in a re-

cent stock manipulation case. Both men were convicted. Mr. Baer, who changed lawyers, ac-

cused Mr. Becker of advising him to give false testimony.

Later, Mr. Kline asserted that he had given false evidence about his own financial records as a witness in another trial, and that Mr. Becker had known about it. The other trial involved extortion charges against Baltimore County Executive Dale N. Anderson, who succeeded former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew as the county executive.

Mr. Becker has denied the allegations of both Mr. Baer and Mr. Kline. He said today that he had taken eight verified lie detector tests that he said, proved he was telling the truth.

Buchen 'Satisfied'

He also said that the tests disproved another assertion by Mr. Kline that the two men had discussed a county judgeship for Mr. Becker in return for a payment of money. Mr. Becker said today that he had discussed a judgeship with Mr. Kline but added that there was no talk of any payment.

In another telephone interview, Mr. Buchen said that Mr. Becker had informed him of all of these events and that he was satisfied that Mr. Becker was in the right.

"Becker is just as straight as he can be," Mr. Buchen said, adding that "somehow he gets involved in those things."

He added that Mr. Becker, who had served as a volunteer without pay in his tasks for Mr. Ford, would not be joining the White House staff.

"He's just starting in a good law practice and we have a mutual understanding that he would stay there," said Mr. Buchen, who replaced J. Fred Buzhardt as the White House counsel.

Mr. Becker, described as about 6 feet tall, fairly heavy set and blond, is married and has three children. He grew up in the Washington area, attended the University of Maryland, American University Law School and lives in Potomac, Maryland.

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MCKENZIE, ON
BURDICK CASE