

THE NATION

AMERICAN NOTES

Help Wanted

Contrary to popular myth, bureaucracies do not run on momentum alone. They need people. Yet the Nixon Administration has been operating for months with one-fourth of its sub-Cabinet posts either empty or filled with stand-in appointees. At a recent celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, eight of eleven high department offices were represented on the podium by acting officials. As they were introduced to the bureaucracy-wise audience of mainly H.E.W. workers, the ludicrousness of their transient titles touched off muffled titters that soon turned to roars of laughter. At present, offices such as the massive Social Security Administration (\$60 billion a year), the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Health Services and Mental Health Administration are without permanent heads. The Department of Defense is almost as undermanned. It now lacks a second Deputy Secretary, and three Assistant Secretaries, including a comptroller. In addition, such a vital post as ambassador to the Soviet Union has been left vacant for more than three months.

With the Administration approaching the 100-day bench mark of its new term, the White House insists that it has been slow in filling vacant posts only because it is having trouble finding exceptionally talented people. But the suspicion persists that loyalty to the President—not talent—is what the White House is really looking for in its appointees. The staffing crisis is likely to grow worse in the wake of the new Watergate disclosures, which should leave quite a few job openings on the White House staff. This term, perhaps, the emphasis should be less on fealty to President and party and more on good and honest government.

Gators in Louisiana

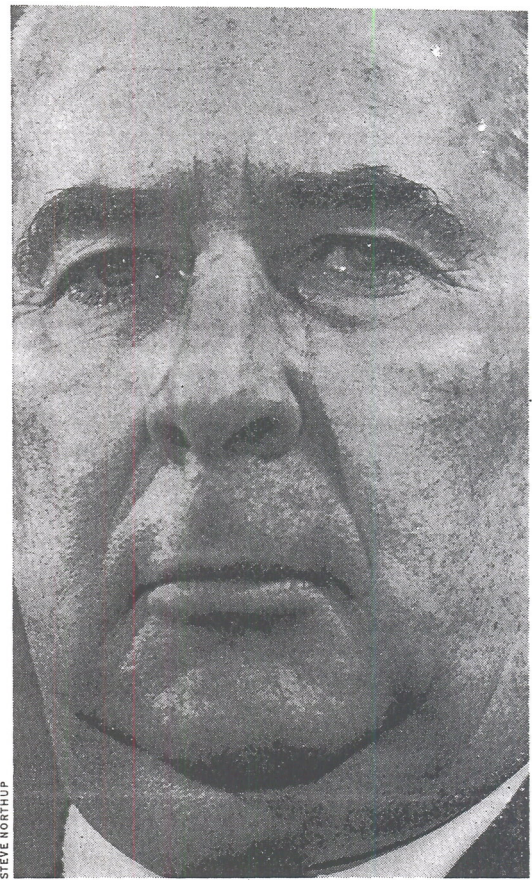
One man's endangered species is another man's backyard pest. That modern-age anomaly is the crux of a dispute between the National Audubon Society and Louisiana's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wild Life. Arguing that a surplus of alligators was eating up such income-producing wildlife as muskrats and waterfowl, Louisiana reopened the

swamplands in Cameron Parish to hunters last fall after an eight-year ban. In 13 days, 1,347 alligator hides were turned over to state authorities to be auctioned off to private businessmen. The Audubon Society, which long ago branched out from birds to the protection of all animals, promptly declared open season on Louisiana. Having praised the state in the past for its enlightened protection of gators, the society charged that even a short hunting season undermined public confidence in the federal endangered-species program.

Louisiana officials know that there is more than one way to skin a gator. Still determined to thin out the swamp population, they recently "offered" more than 2,000 of the reptiles to the Audubon Society. The organization's leaders bravely accepted the gift, and plan to truck the alligators to refuges in other Southern states. In the bargain, Audubon officials also got some free advice from William Summerville, general curator of the Staten Island Zoo in New York City: "Keep their backs sprayed while they're in the truck so they don't dry out. Make sure they're all the same size so they don't eat each other, and keep them out of the sun." Oh yes, and don't look a gift gator in the mouth.

A Priority for Grass

As thermometers hit unseasonable highs throughout much of the East and Midwest last week, Americans turned their attention to grass—seeds, weed-killers, fertilizers, mowers, sprinklers and all those things that are supposed to turn lawns and neighbors green. But in Berkeley, Calif., home of the Free Speech movement and other radical causes, citizens were busy greening a different kind of grass. By the overwhelming vote of 28,116 to 18,032, the young, liberal voters of that campus town passed the Berkeley Marijuana Initiative, ordering police to give marijuana laws "their lowest priority" and requiring authorization of the Berkeley city council for every "arrest for possession, use or cultivation" of the weed. Appalled police officials quickly pointed out that the initiative conflicts with California state laws and threatened that if the council did not give them a free hand in enforcing those laws, they might have to call in state authorities. But Berkeley citizens evidently felt that the police these days have more pressing tasks to perform than busting marijuana users.



FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN MITCHELL



DENNIS BRACK—BLACK STAR