

The Andrew Gibson Fiasco

A nasty little civil war has broken out in the White House between Nixon holdovers and President Ford's personal aides over the fiasco of Andrew Gibson's aborted nomination as Federal Energy Administrator.

The Ford men say failure to spot Gibson's apparent conflict of interest before announcing his appointment revealed weaknesses of the Nixon-style staff system adopted by the new President. Nixon holdovers privately claim Mr. Ford never gave the system a chance. But all implicitly agree the root cause was the President's uncharacteristic and intemperate haste in naming a replacement for John Sawhill at the Federal Energy Administration (FEA).

The fault is clearly not Gibson's. He was interviewed by William Walker and Richard Chaney, two trusted aides of Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld. Gibson has told friends these staffers had in hand the essence of his extraordinary \$88,000-a-year, 10-year separation agreement from the Interstate Oil Transport Co. after his 16 months' employment; White House sources claim the full extent of the agreement was not known.

But intimate Ford advisers are sure there was more than enough information about Gibson's arrangement for any savvy political hand to know he should never be nominated. The shortcoming of Rumsfeld's staff, they say, is that the Gibson appointment was never considered by those old hands around Mr. Ford.

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Not so, say several White House staffers (particularly holdovers). The reason Gibson was not disqualified was that Mr. Ford in his haste short-circuited the staff system, just as he did in the damaging nomination of Peter Flanigan as ambassador to Spain. The President, they say, refused to take time for full staff clearance of either Gibson or Flanigan.

Everyone agrees Mr. Ford was frantic to remove Sawhill because of his public disagreements with administration policy. While tolerant of incompetents in his inherited Cabinet, Mr. Ford could not abide one more day of Sawhill.

A footnote: The angry reaction by some presidential aides that Gibson was the victim of "post-Watergate morality" conjures up echoes of the Nixon White House. Even Ford insiders admit that Gibson's deal would have ruled him out for the federal post long before Watergate.

Prospects for new welfare reform

being proposed by President Ford in 1975 were not helped by his secret conference with Gov. Ronald Reagan of California in Los Angeles Oct. 30.

Reagan pressed the President not to resurrect the old "Moynihan plan" for welfare—a reference to the 1969 Family Assistance Plan (FAP) promoted by Daniel P. Moynihan, now ambassador to India, as a Nixon aide. Mr. Ford replied that no decision had been taken but that he would keep Reagan's views in mind.

Indeed, with Mr. Ford eager to appease the party's Reagan-led right wing, Reagan's views could well prove compelling. Reagan would never accept the welfare reform option given Mr. Ford by the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Department. The President has instructed HEW Secretary Casper Weinberger to draft a more conservative scheme, but influential presidential aides would just as soon forget welfare reform for 1975.

With Gov. George C. Wallace of Ala-

bama scheduled to be in Washington last week, an aide telephoned Democratic National Chairman Robert Strauss to arrange a meeting between them at Democratic national headquarters—a "liberal" bastion never before visited by Wallace.

The meeting never took place because Wallace's trip to Washington was canceled. But the call to Strauss suggested two short-range developments: (1) Whatever his long-range intentions, Wallace will now work within the Democratic Party rather than go third-party; (2) his warm-and-cold relationship with Strauss is warm again.

Wallace watched Strauss on NBC's "Meet the Press" Nov. 3 and was gratified when the chairman flatly said he could support a Democratic ticket with Wallace for President or Vice President—a pledge most Democratic politicians refuse to make. "I would like for Gov. Wallace to stay in our party," said Strauss, again in contrast to many Democrats.

A footnote: Strauss nourished a budding relationship with another powerful southern Democrat, Rep. Joe Waggoner of Louisiana, by speaking at Waggoner's political rally in Shreveport last week. As a pro-Nixon congressman, Waggoner was once expected to cross over to the Republicans. But he is now working with Strauss in hopes of a more moderate national Democratic Party.