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# A Move for Mr. Hartmann?

Plans are afoot to move presidential counselor Robert Hartmann's office out of the White House into the Executive Office Building next door, interposing a physical barrier between President Ford and his oldest, perhaps politically shrewdest aide.

The new White House staff reorganization confirms what happened some time ago: His jurisdiction limited to politics and speechwriting, Hartmann is no longer the Ford alter ego of house minority leader and vice presidential days. With Hartmann privately criticized at the White House for his performance of those duties, the scheme to move his office across Executive Avenue early next year constitutes further symbolic downgrading in a city where physical proximity is read as connoting power.

However, even Hartmann's critics concede his excellent political instincts, a desperately needed commodity in today's White House. Moreover—coincidentally or not—the Ford presidency's first month when Hartmann's influence was pervasive was vastly more successful than recent weeks when he has been more distant from the President. Moving Hartmann across the street, while tidying up White House operations, may ration sage advice for Mr. Ford.

Hartmann's hopes of continuing as a general adviser to Mr. Ford were doomed when Donald Rumsfeld, orderly and efficient, returned from diplomatic service in Europe to become

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White House chief of staff. Rumsfeld was flatly opposed to free-floating cabinet-level counselors—Hartmann and ex-Congressman Jack Marsh—without specific jurisdiction. Accordingly, Rumsfeld's reorganization gave Hartmann jurisdiction over politics and speechwriting (with Marsh given congressional liaison).

That created problems for Hartmann, a former newspaperman who by his own admission is no administrator. While a superb speechwriter himself, he is ill-equipped to coordinate a presidential speechwriting effort. While politically canny, he is inexperienced in organizational politics.

The result: Hartmann is blamed for botching assignments he never wanted. Fellow staffers criticize him for not pulling the full range of government expertise into preparing the President's statements. Mr. Ford's peddler than prepared statements at his last news conference are cited as horrible examples.

Simultaneously, these duties have pulled Hartmann from the President's side. Other aides say he felt kept outside the mainstream of events while

accompanying Mr. Ford on his Far Eastern trip.

Without the Rumsfeld-Hartmann confrontation predicted by some administration officials actually happening, relationships have changed: Rumsfeld slowly moving into policy areas while Hartmann moves out of them. Moving Hartmann across the street would symbolize that phenomenon.

The imminent fall of Rep. Willbur D. Mills as House Ways and Means Committee chairman does not undercut a backstage push, more deadly serious than generally realized, to purge Rep. F. Edward Hebert of Louisiana as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

In fact, chances are at least even that, in January, the liberal-dominated House Democratic Caucus will deliver the most devastating blow yet to the seniority system by unchariting Hebert. In the process, the caucus could stir passions splitting the House Democratic leadership.

Although many veteran congressmen still do not take seriously the threat to Hebert, many of the 75 new Demo-

cratic House members immediately after being elected started pouring over voting records to find a committee chairman so deviating from liberal standards that he could be purged as an object lesson.

Some selected Rep. M. R. (Bob) Poage of Texas, chairman of the Agriculture Committee—particularly since his successor would be Rep. Thomas Foley of Washington, chairman of the liberal Democratic Study Group (DSG). But experienced House reformers feel Poage's problem is autocratic style, not ideology. They believe purging Hebert, a crusty old conservative and indomitable champion of national defense, would provide a better object lesson against Democratic right deviationism. Besides, his successor would be Rep. Melvin Price of Illinois, a moderate not offensive to the remnants of the House Democratic establishment.

Nor was this changed by Mills' misfortunes. Since it is likely to be voluntary and caused by personal tragedy rather than ideology, his replacement as chairman is not seen by the reformers as a real assault on seniority.

Thus, Speaker Carl Albert and Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill may soon face an agonizing choice: Turn against old comrade Eddie Herbert or risk offending the expanded liberal bloc. But Rep. Philip Burton of California, the new caucus chairman, will be solidly behind the purge-Hebert movement.