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Mr. Ford's White House Takes Shape

Under the influence of the White House chief of staff, Donald Rumsfeld, a distinctly Ford administration is now taking shape. New appointments are being made, and they represent clear improvements over the Nixon hold-overs.

But it remains a question whether the Ford administration is going to be good enough and quick enough and well-integrated enough to arrest the awful economic slide now in progress. Except for one possibility, the auguries are certainly not favorable.

Probably the most important sign of what is happening is the President's selection of his first new cabinet member. Edward Levi, president of the University of Chicago, has emerged as Mr. Ford's choice to replace William Saxbe as Attorney General.

Mr. Levi is a law professor of distinction, remarkable for his grace of expression and his duly modest sense of the role the judicial system plays in American life. He ran the University of Chicago during the time of the worst campus troubles in a way that maintained the highest academic standards without causing the breaking of heads. I think he did a better job at Chicago during the truly bad times than the president of any other major university. He would be, moreover, the first truly nonpolitical Attorney General in decades.

Precisely because he is an academic without political standing, word of his prospective appointment drew fire from Republicans and the crusty Democrats who run the Senate Judiciary Committee. Mr. Rumsfeld, who hails from Chicago and knows Mr. Levi, stood firm for the appointment. Now it looks like it's going through, and it will add luster to the administration as well as a sadly tarnished Justice Department.

Another step away from the Nixon legacy is the resignation of Roy Ash as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Mr. Ash was slightly less hawkish on inflation than Treasury Secretary William Simon and Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers.

But not much. He certainly played a leading part in causing the administration to concentrate too long and too



Donald Rumsfeld, White House chief of staff.

By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

hard on inflation while the avalanche of recession was making up.

His apparent replacement is James Lynn, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Mr. Lynn, another Rumsfeld buddy, is a bright Harvard lawyer known for his survivability. He has been liked by almost everybody in both the Nixon and Ford administrations. If nothing else, that suggests a flexibility which is one of the qualities required to deal with present economic difficulties.

A further sign of the Rumsfeld influence is a new organizational chart setting out the division of responsibilities in the White House. It establishes lines of authority with a clarity rare in White House operations though much in keeping with Rumsfeld's open approach. It is notable that one key responsibility — personnel — has been turned over to William Walker, another close Rumsfeld associate.

Unfortunately, the new set-up perpetuates a division of responsibility which was established out of mistrust for the bureaucracy by the Nixon administration. The Domestic Council, which was essentially a watchdog on the Office of Management and Budget, remains.

There seems to be no one with central responsibility for domestic programs as a focal point for those two closely interrelated problems — economic policy and energy policy. Mr. Ford lacks someone to do for him what Bill Moyers, Ted Sorensen, Clark Clifford and Sam Rosenman did for a string of Democratic Presidents who had to make domestic problems their primary concern.

What this means is that domestic programs, economic policy and energy policy are going to be left to the pulling and hauling of the different departments and agencies. The two anti-inflationary theologians — Mr. Simon and Mr. Greenspan — are bound to have powerful input.

So while the administration is changing, and changing for the better, it is still hard to see the powerful figure who could pull things together in a major effort to turn around the recession. The one hopeful possibility is that the President might, as he has hinted, turn over the leading domestic policy role to the one undoubtedly strong man in his administration — Nelson Rockefeller.