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EVANS AND NOVAK**Mitchell Behind Richardson Shift**

WASHINGTON — The fine hand of Atty. Gen. John Mitchell, top sergeant of the Nixon cabinet, was pulling strings behind the scenes in the surprising switch of Elliott Richardson from the panelled halls of the State Department to the bloody battlefield of Health, Education and Welfare last week. Mitchell, architect of the Southern strategy, told President Nixon that Richardson was his first choice to head the job being vacated by HEW Secretary Robert Finch, bloody after repeated bruising confrontations with the attorney general.

In view of liberal Richardson's commitment to school desegregation and his Eastern Establishment political base in Boston, his sponsorship by conservative Mitchell would be incredible save for this fact: Mitchell had become frustrated to the point of apoplexy in his dealings with HEW's chaotic bureaucracy.

With Finch, an admittedly poor manager, having been eased out, Mitchell advised Mr. Nixon to replace him with a self-assured administrator capable of knocking heads together. Specifically, Mitchell wanted someone who could take a position and stick to it, without backing and filling.

Mitchell intimates say he recommended Richardson because he was convinced, after studying Richardson's handling of the flabby State Department bureaucracy and watching him in innumerable White House meetings, that he had the mental discipline to end disorder at HEW. Even before that, Mitchell had been high on Richardson, recommending him for under secretary of state to serve as a buffer between the troublesome Foreign Service and Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

A footnote: Southern Republican leaders, including most of the state chairmen, have been warned by Mississippi state Chairman Clarke Reed not to crow over the resignation of Finch (a Southern hairshirt for 17 months). Richardson, according to Reed, may be tougher on civil rights than Finch.