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Rise in Rumsfeld's Influence Is Noted

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 17—The influence of Donald Rumsfeld has been rising and continues to rise in President Nixon's inner circle of advisers. Mr. Rumsfeld wears two hats—assistant to the President and director of the anti-poverty agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity—but most bureaucrats have tended to treat him simply as the antipoverty chief. A clear indication of Mr. Rumsfeld's power at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is that he is now a member of the handful of aides who meet regularly over coffee at 8 A.M. to discuss Mr. Nixon's problems and to plan the day ahead.

This group has now shrunk to six (with occasional visitors): Mr. Rumsfeld; H. R. Haldeman, chief of staff; George P. Shultz, director of the Office of Management and Budget; John D. Ehrlichman, chief domestic planner; Robert H. Finch, counselor to the President, and Henry A. Kissinger, adviser on national security affairs.

Mr. Rumsfeld's standing is such that two months ago he was designated by his colleagues to coordinate White House political activity this fall. Mr. Rumsfeld held the job for about two weeks, during which he tried to convince his associates that the head of the antipoverty agency had no business accepting a visibly partisan role in political planning. His arguments finally prevailed, and Mr. Finch was given the task.

The rise of Mr. Rumsfeld has contributed to speculation among O.E.O. staffers that the 38-year-old former Illinois Representative may some day leave the antipoverty agency, which is a bundle of headaches, for the less troublesome atmosphere of his White House office, where he is spending a considerable amount of his time.

Such speculation is firmly denied by all concerned, but it has been noted here that O.E.O. is not one of the Administration's favorite agencies, that it is likely to suffer further dismemberment, and that when Daniel Patrick Moynihan leaves the White

House—as he is expected to do early next year—Mr. Nixon may find himself in need of a full-time adviser on poverty and urban problems.

The Middle East crisis, the unraveling of the peace talks, and the hijackings are believed to have taken a greater toll on Presidential energies than is generally supposed. Out in San Clemente, Secretary of State William P. Rogers confided to intimates that he had rarely seen the President look better. But a conservative writer, Victor Lasky, who spent some time with the President last week, told friends the President looked preoccupied and tired.

Touching Mr. Lasky on the arm, he asked the writer, who is headed for Israel, to extend regards to the inhabitants of a kibbutz Mr. Nixon visited several years ago and to "tell them I'm thinking of them." Despite other activities on his schedule, Mr. Nixon has been able to think of little else besides the Middle East in recent weeks.

No matter how enmeshed he becomes in the intricacies of diplomacy, Mr. Nixon can find some surcease in what seems to be an increasingly popular (or at least increasingly well-publicized) institution at the White House. It is called the "open hour"—a break in the Presidential routine when, at noon, Mr. Nixon spends 50 or 60 minutes in his office greeting visitors who have little or no discernible connection with the great affairs of state.

One day this week, for instance, this extraordinary assemblage (each of whom got about five minutes of

Presidential time) included: the owners of a minority-owned company in Florida that manufactures American flags, the president of Rotary International, a departing White House staff member, an incoming White House staff member, the president of the Export-Import Bank, an outgoing Assistant Secretary of Transportation and the president of the Machine Tool Association, who expressed thanks to Mr. Nixon for declaring Sept. 20-26 as American Machine Tool Week. Photographs were taken at each meeting.

Out in San Clemente, where things are more relaxed, the open hour takes on the flavor of an afternoon at central casting. One day a few weeks ago, Mr. Nixon greeted a 13-year-old girl who had tackled drug abuse in her home town in California; a 104-year-old Admiral; a fellow who had painted a picture of President Eisenhower; the Mayor of Whittier, Mr. Nixon's boyhood home; and the officers of the San Onofre Surfing Club. In subsequent days, a succession of middle-American heroes—Lawrence Welk, Sugar Ray Robinson and Col. Frank Borman, the astronaut—came to call.

Some White House staffers say the open hour keeps the President in touch with "what the nation is really thinking." A more modest judgment may be that it gives Mr. Nixon a respite from heavy thinking, concentrates most of the obligatory ceremonial demands of the White House into a more manageable time span, and yields a picture for the hometown papers, which hurts neither the visitor nor the politician in the Oval Office.