

Inside Report

Buckley on the Warpath

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON — A private letter from conservative tastemaker William F. Buckley Jr., to senior White House aide Peter Flanigan spells continuing trouble in President Nixon's courtship of angry Republican conservatives.

Buckley's confidential letter, the second smoking missive between him and Flanigan, ridiculed Flanigan's demand that Buckley repudiate the conservative Republican presidential candidacy of Rep. John Ashbrook of Ohio because the White House helped Sen. James L. Buckley of New York in his successful 1970 campaign.

"I TRIED TO SAY IT as gently as I could in my first letter," Buckley wrote Flanigan on Feb. 16. "And it is with some embarrassment that I now put it more directly: The backing of my brother by Richard Nixon in November of 1970 gives his administration zero claim on me to back administration policies when I disapprove of them."

Those ungentle words constitute the one dark cloud on the otherwise sunny political horizon for Mr. Nixon. With the Democratic Party in increasing disarray and his own fortunes prospering, the President still must worry about disaffection on the Republican right influenced by columnist-editor Buckley.

Flanigan, a Manhattan socialite who left the New York investment house of Dillon Read to become a presidential aide in the White House, started a running feud in a telephone call shortly after Buckley's magazine, the National Review, endorsed Ashbrook for President. Flanigan's interven-

tion, not cleared with Mr. Nixon's top political advisers, was counter-productive.

Buckley's first act on returning from accompanying the President to Peking (he was one of three columnists invited) was an attack on Nixon's detente with Communist China. He made the speech in New Hampshire with candidate Ashbrook at his side.

Even before going to China, however, Buckley's Feb. 16 letter to Flanigan demolished the idea he owed the President anything in his brother's behalf: "I have backed Mr. Nixon on a thousand occasions without once supposing that for that reason he owed me anything. One of these days you will have to remind yourself that there are really quite a lot of people in the United States who are NOT running for office, and for whom patronage from the White House is NOT the supreme ambition, and that because you lead so cosmopolitan a life, the odds are that every now and then you are actually going to bump into one such; or, if you prefer, that you will be run over by one."

AS FOR FLANIGAN'S angry call from the White House, Buckley informed him in a P.S. that "(White House aide) Len Garment was here for a couple of days, and gave me the bad news, that you had broken your Achilles tendon. Did you do so while talking over the telephone?"

That Buckleyism reflected the tone of the letter, but its vital heart was this: "Mr. Nixon is not vested by the Constitution with the power to repeal conservative doctrine; nor, alas, with the power to emasculate the missionary ideology of the Soviet Union."