



John Mitchell

WASHINGTON — Despite fears that overkill reaction to Sen. George McGovern's political attacks could unwittingly help reunite the shattered Democratic party, President Nixon has ordered immediate counterattacks under command of Charles Colson, a senior White House aide expert in political propaganda techniques.

Colson and selected other presidential aides — speechwriter Patrick Buchanan, media experts John Scali and Kenneth Clawson and occasionally White House major domo H. R. "Bob" Haldeman — orchestrate the counterattacks in daily, early-morning meetings at the White House.

However, their overall control has broken down almost immediately. The attack on Ramsey Clark's visit to Hanoi by John Mitchell, formerly Mr. Nixon's campaign manager and still his intimate adviser, was not in Colson's scenario for handling Clark's escapades. The Colson group, feeling most Americans were infuriated by Clark's statements in Hanoi with no need for White House prompting, had planned a low-key response. Consequently, the White House operatives were angered when Mitchell — ON HIS OWN — bombarded Clark.

Mute until ordered

Mr. Nixon wants the Colson group to control totally the political response, all Republicans staying mute until marching orders come from the White House. Mitchell's unprompted blast against Clark shows the difficulties of running such a delicate operation.

The most successful orchestration so far by Colson's group was the modulated response to Sargent Shriver's charge that Mr. Nixon "blew" an alleged chance for Vietnam peace in January 1969.

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, obeying Mr. Nixon's insistence that he keep a low profile, handled Shriver's charge gingerly — passing it off as the blunder of an "inexperienced" politician. Colson assigned the role of heavy in knocking down Shriver not to

Will campaign overkill kill the Republicans?

"bad guy" Agnew but to a "good guy": Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

Fearful of overkill

But even this successful stage-managing troubled many Republican leaders at the Miami Beach convention, who fear overkill could drive millions of disaffected Democrats into McGovern's arms. Their view: let headlines and television screens tell the story.

The President and the Colson group reject that theory, for two reasons: first, to maintain party morale at the grass roots, hard counterattack is essential; second, and more important, ever wilder swings by McGovern and Shriver are expected by the White House, and Mr. Nixon wants the Colson group's techniques to be ready for them.

BLOUNT'S SECRET WEAPON

Former Postmaster General Winston "Red" Blount has been handed a secret weapon that could win him a seat from Alabama in the U. S. Senate against veteran Democratic Sen. John J. Sparkman — and

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

possibly bring Republican control of the Senate for the first time in 20 years.

The weapon: a decision by John Cashin, head of the predominantly black National Democratic Party of Alabama (NDPA), to instruct Alabama blacks to vote for the McGovern-Shriver ticket on the NDPA line, not the regular Democratic party line (which has a separate slate of electors).

Cashin's decision could swing 100,000 or more black voters to the NDPA voting column — which includes John LeFlore, a long-time black leader in Mobile, as candidate for the Senate. The cost to Sparkman of losing that many votes to LeFlore could be victory by Blount, who now trails Sparkman by at least 12 percentage points.

Cashin's decision is ironic for the national Democratic party's top priority fight to keep Senate control because it stems directly from Sen. McGovern's decision not to waste time or money in Alabama. The word that McGovern managers will bypass the Deep South and concede it to President Nixon convinced Cashin there was no need to worry about dividing votes between McGovern-Shriver electors on the regular Democratic line and electors on the NDPA line; after all, McGovern concedes he can't win the state under any conditions.

So, Cashin passed word to his black organization: Vote for McGovern-Shriver on the NDPA line, guaranteeing a big vote for LeFlore that could change the balance of power in Washington for the next two years.