

NO. STATES ITEM NOV 10 DEC 11 1972

Nixon's new faceless cabinet

WASHINGTON—The sacking of Peter G. Peterson as secretary of Commerce in the wake of his triumphant international economic negotiations is the key to the otherwise baffling makeup of President Nixon's second-term cabinet.

Peterson flunked two tests of cabinet-making which have guided Mr. Nixon and his inner circle at Camp David: First, the cabinet member must fit the political grand design for a new Republican majority; second, he cannot be a genuine personage, possibly unwilling to subordinate himself to White House aides.

Besides eliminating Peterson, those tests insured a second-term cabinet both faceless and symbolically political. That was the intent of the five cabinet-makers at Camp David: The President, aides H. R. "Bob" Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and Charles Colson and that immensely influential Houston lawyer, John B. Connally.

Clear intent

Nowhere is their intent clearer than the Commerce Department. Stripping the secretary of foreign duties fits the scheme of concentrating still more power in the White House. The new secretary, South Carolina textiles executive Frederick Dent, meets both tests: First, a political novice, he is unlikely to challenge the White House; second, he helps cement the Southern wing of the new Republican coalition. Indeed, the cabinet-makers considered only Southern business executives to replace Peterson.

Conversely, Peterson was deemed unfit for multiple reasons: His high visibility, his liberal friends on the Georgetown dinner circuit, his favorable press notices. The last straw was the Dec. 4

edition of Time declaring: "After less than a year in the job, he is wielding more clout than any Commerce secretary since Herbert Hoover."

Peterson's disability

But Peterson's biggest disability may have been his failure to fit Mr. Nixon's political grand design. In White House discussions, aides grumbled about Peter-

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

son's past business association (at Bell and Howell) and continuing friendship with Sen. Charles H. Percy of Illinois. Since the White House targets Percy as public enemy No. 1 who must be kept from the 1976 presidential nomination, a Percy ally in the cabinet is intolerable.

As we reported a week ago, Peterson was asked to become ambassador to NATO with greatly expanded duties in international economic negotiations. Mr. Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry F. Kissinger, intended this as a major position for Peterson. But the European base, making the mission harder to perform, would have pushed Peterson out of Washington as desired by the White House staff. The requirement to move to Europe also, less than coincidentally, led to Peterson's rejecting it for personal reasons.

Transportation secretary

Similar logic dictated a new secretary of Transportation. Despite public statements to the contrary, John Volpe wanted to stay. But the former governor of

Massachusetts was too publicity conscious, too independent and too much the politician for the cabinet-makers.

At one point, defeated Sen. Gordon Allott of Colorado was mentioned as Volpe's successor. But there was no desire for another experienced politician there. The eventual choice, Claude S. Brinegar, is described by those who knew him at Union Oil Co. as a bland organization man sure to submit to White House orders.

Construction union leader Peter Brennan as secretary of Labor shocked high administration officials who see him totally unqualified and are urging the White House that a strong administrator had better be named under secretary. But Brennan at Labor fits the Nixon political grand design as much as Dent does and Peterson does not at Commerce.

Consistent pattern

The pattern is consistent. Articulate, energetic Republican politicians—Donald Rumsfeld (who winds up at NATO) and George Bush (asked by Mr. Nixon to become Republican national chairman)—were opposed for cabinet posts by top Nixon advisers. Able and ambitious Mayor Richard Lugar of Indianapolis was passed over as secretary of Housing and Urban Development in favor of the able but politically unambitious Commerce Under Secretary James Lynn (whose appointment shocked even pro-Nixon mayors).

"Who cares?" snapped a presidential aide, questioned about the second cabinet's stature. "The cabinet doesn't mean anything." Except for political symbolism in the Brennan and Dent appointments, the cabinet-makers of Camp David have made sure it does not.