

Nixon's New 'Ehrlichman'

By Vera Glaser and
Malvina Stephenson

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THE WHITE House official who comes closest to filling John Ehrlichman's hastily vacated shoes is a 35-year-old former New York ad man whose face is dotted from a recent bout with chicken pox.

Kenneth R. Cole Jr., director of the Domestic Council, was relatively anonymous in the White House pecking order for five years.

Now he is described as the President's "final policy review" man on big domestic issues but some governors and mayors complain that he lacks authority.

In an interview in his plush West Wing office, Cole admitted the Watergate scandal "has created an atmosphere of uncertainty that is unhealthy."

He switches his television occasionally to the sensational Senate hearings because "I wouldn't miss it for the world," but resents reports that the affair has brought government to a standstill.

"All the people I deal with are still putting in their 14-to-17 hour days and they're turning out the work," Cole insists.

Through close ties to a pair of Nixon aides who resigned under fire Cole has been touched, but thus far not tainted, by Watergate. They are former Appointments Secretary Dwight Chapin and Presidential Assistant Ehrlichman.

Chapin who first brought Cole to Nixon's attention in 1967, resigned abruptly when linked to political saboteur Donald Segretti, but according to Cole has remained his "very close friend."

As Ehrlichman's top deputy Cole succeeded him last December as Domestic Council chief but professes to know nothing of his former boss' alleged involvement in the bugging, burglary and coverup which cost him his job.

"I would be shaken to my toes," Cole said, "if John has done all the things alleged."

As for President Nixon, Cole is "absolutely and totally certain" he is not involved. He sees more of Nix-

on these days as he serves up options for decision.

Cole is a stocky fellow with friendly brown eyes and close-cropped graying hair who dresses in conservative suits and well-shined loafers. He has taken a lot of ribbing since contracting chicken pox from his small daughter. The scars sometimes take a year to vanish.

From his splendid office papered in blue grasscloth and fitted out with heavy linen upholstery, gleaming mahogany furniture and potted red geraniums, Cole takes calls on a 22-button telephone. He sits in on Cabinet and congressional leadership meetings and draws a \$40,000 salary.

A former colleague described him as "eminently capable, with a talent for mediating divergent positions. He seems able to handle the Cabinet members."

Cole himself denies he is a mediator or an adviser.

"Members of the Cabinet are advisers. They are advocates. My job is to give him (the President) a free flow of ideas and present their thoughts in an orderly way, so that he can come to grips with the problem and make a decision."

Cole appears unperturbed by criticism that Nixon's youthful aides lack political or governmental expertise, but admits that "never in my wildest dreams" did he expect to be where he is.

He knew "nothing" in his first year he recalled and doesn't know how he survived. Now he feels five years have given him "a pretty good understanding of how government works, at least at this level."

After taking his degree in Business Administration at Bucknell University, Cole served in the Navy, worked in advertising, then in customer service for the Elizabethtown, N.J., Gas Company. He expects to return to private business when his White House stint is over.

Cole's description of his work appears to parallel that of foreign policy aide Henry Kissinger, who also says he offers options to the President.

But Cole demurs modestly. "I could never operate like Henry. I'm just not up to that. But that is my approach to the job."