

By E. W. KENWORTHY

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 11—President Nixon has asked Congressional and party leaders for help in choosing a successor to Spiro T. Agnew.

This solicitation of advice accords with the public style Mr. Nixon set in going about the selection of a running mate in 1968.

If Mr. Nixon ignores the advice he has asked for, it will also accord with his private style of operating when—to the amazement, consternation and even anger of many of his closest aides and factions across the party spectrum—he chose Mr. Agnew.

Several of Mr. Nixon's campaign aides in 1968 and political reporters—writing in retrospect—are convinced that he had decided on Mr. Agnew many weeks before the Miami convention in Au-

gust, 1968, and that the letters he wrote to party leaders beforehand and the conferences just before and after his nomination were a charade.

View in the Capital

There thus seems to be a widespread disposition in Washington to believe that Mr. Nixon had decided on a proposed successor to Mr. Agnew long before the Vice President's resignation.

But there are also those in Washington who point out that these are different times, and that President Nixon, post-Watergate, dealing with a Congress under Democratic control, is hardly in the same position as Mr. Nixon dealing with a Republican convention that had just nominated him on the first ballot.

In his book "Catch the Falling Flag," Richard J. Whalen, who served as a speech writer for Mr. Nixon

in the early stages of the 1968 campaign, writes that weeks before the convention, letters had gone out over Mr. Nixon's signature to hundreds of party officials asking their advice on a Vice President, and that "everyone who remotely mattered thus was given the satisfying but misleading impression that he was in on the decision."

"Similar ego-inflating techniques," Mr. Whalen writes, "were used by Nixon in face-to-face meetings at Miami Beach." The advice from professionals, he states, counted for little, as "their letters stacked up unread at headquarters."

Originally, Mr. Nixon's field for selection was, like Gaul, divided into three parts. Dominating the left of the party were Governor Rockefeller of New York, Mayor Lindsay and Senator Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon.

The tall man on the right

was Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, and the short man was Senator John G. Tower of Texas.

The most prominent men of the middle were Senators Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee and Charles H. Percy of Illinois, Robert H. Finch, Lieutenant Governor of California who had gone through the political wars at Mr. Nixon's side, and Gov. John A. Volpe of Massachusetts.

Mr. Whalen writes that before Mr. Nixon began meditating on his acceptance speech and strategy, he eliminated the "glamour boys" of right and left, Mr. Reagan and Mr. Lindsay. According to newspaper accounts at the time, Mr. Nixon had little enthusiasm for Mr. Rockefeller, who had re-emerged as a Presidential candidate after taking himself out of the running on March 21.

Of the men in the middle, Mr. Nixon decided that Senator Baker was too young and

Some Feel He Has Already Decided

inexperienced. He did not like Senator Percy. He offered the nomination to Mr. Finch—how seriously is a matter of dispute—but acquiesced in Mr. Finch's contention that this would open Mr. Nixon to charges of cronyism.

Hatfield Supported

A few liberals in the Nixon preconvention campaign were pushing Senator Hatfield and even elicited the support of the Rev. Billy Graham. But Senator Hatfield had been a critic of Vietnam, although a restrained one, and John N. Mitchell and H. R. Halde- man opposed consideration of him.

Mr. Nixon had promised the coalition of Southerners and Western conservatives represented by Senator Strom Thurmond of North Carolina and Barry Goldwater of Arizona that he would select a "non-divisive" running mate.

This left Governor Volpe, and Mr. Nixon had been

known to look favorably on him as a middle of the roader, an Italian Roman Catholic with an appeal to ethnic groups who was acceptable to Southern and Western conservatives. Up to the night of Mr. Nixon's nomination, several of his closet advisers thought Mr. Volpe was in the lead.

In three meetings after his nomination at 2 A.M.—one at 2:45, a second hour later and a third at 9—Mr. Nixon, according to a New York Times reporter, somewhat casually put forward the name of another middle of the roader, Governor Agnew of Maryland. One of Mr. Nixon's aides said later that the name was received "in silence." Another said the name "got a big shrug."

But almost certainly, Mr. Nixon had apparently decided on Mr. Agnew weeks before. Mr. Agnew, head of the draft Rockefeller campaign at Mr. Rockefeller's request, had

been angered and humiliated when the Governor withdrew his name at a news conference March 21 without a prior call to Mr. Agnew.

A few days later, Mr. Nixon had a long talk with Mr. Agnew in New York. This was followed by several other conferences. The only political observer to sense a straw in the wind was David S. Broder of The Washington Post, who wrote on May 17 that Mr. Nixon "has been paying keen interest to Agnew as a Vice-Presidential nominee."

Even Mr. Nixon's selection of Mr. Agnew to nominate him failed to alert the convention to Mr. Nixon's intentions.

While many think Mr. Nixon has been similarly keeping his own counsel in the selection of Mr. Agnew's successor and will ignore the counsel he has invited, others doubt he can afford to do so.

There are, indeed, different times.