

Ford's Staff: A Reflection of the Man

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The staff that Gerald R. Ford has assembled after seven months as Vice President is a faithful reflection of the man himself. It is predominantly middle-aged, Midwestern, conservative in its politics, and savvy in the ways of Capitol Hill. It is even less flashy in its collective personality than the man it serves.

The Ford staff is also, in the view of some of the Vice President's friends, seriously underequipped in the range of expertise, viewpoints and ideas needed by a man who is a heartbeat—or an impeachment—away from the White House.

There is no evidence that Ford himself—who recently cautioned his 64 office employees not to air their differ-

ences with outsiders—is either dissatisfied with their work or concerned about the rumored feuds that always attach themselves to any large political organization.

On the contrary, Ford has surrounded himself chiefly with men and women he has known well for years, and has gone out of his way to convey the desire that they behave as they always have—and not take on the airs of a White House staff-in-waiting.

Robert T. Hartmann, the burly newspaperman who is the chief of staff, draws a contrast with the operations of Spiro Agnew's staff. "After he [Agnew] found out which way the wind was blowing, his staff tried desperately to be totally independent of the White House," Hartmann says. "Some people would like for us to be totally depend-

ent. We're trying to hit the golden mean."

Hitting "the golden mean" has meant that Ford has chosen his senior staff primarily to help him carry out the roles Mr. Nixon has assigned to him, as Republican Party campaigner, administration liaison man with Congress and trouble-shooter on defense legislation.

In all other areas, he relies on the briefings and information Mr. Nixon chooses to make available to him and on what he gleans while roaming Capitol Hill and the country.

The age of Ford's senior staff—described by one of its members as "the oldest in town"—is a clear indication that he does not want to surround him-

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self with a group of young chargers who might be suspected of waiting eagerly for their turn at those West-Wing White House offices.

Hartmann, first in rank among the five members of the "action group" formed a month ago in an effort to get better coordination of staff functions, is a 57-year-old former Washington bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times. Like several others in the Vice President's inner circle, he began working for Ford in 1965, when Ford took over as House minority leader.

The others who attend the weekly "Action group" meetings with Ford are:

- John O. Marsh, 47, a former four-term conservative Democratic congressman from Virginia, who moved to Ford's staff after a year as the Pentagon's top lobbyist.

- Richard T. Burrell, 52, a veteran of Republican congressional staffs who worked on White House congressional liaison in the first Nixon administration.

- Walter L. Mote, 50, a Senate staff member for almost 30 years who ran Agnew's Capitol Hill office and is the only principal alumnus of the Agnew operation retained by Ford.

- L. William Seidman, 53, millionaire businessman from Ford's home town of Grand Rapids, who is the only newcomer to the group and the only one whose natural orientation is elsewhere than Capitol Hill.

With Hartmann designated chief of staff, Burrell, Marsh and Seidman are all on the next rank as assistants to the Vice President.

Burrell has responsibility for legisla-

tion and domestic affairs, a familiar area for one who has served as a principal minority staffer on the House Education and Labor Committee, counsel to the House Republican Policy Committee and a White House aide in the first Nixon administration.

Mote is Burgess' deputy-in-residence on Capitol Hill, and Ford, a Hill man himself, asked that Mote, the only member of the senior staff housed outside the Executive Office Building, sit on the "action group" meetings, even though he does not enjoy the same status on the organization chart as the others present.

Marsh handles defense and international areas for Ford, occupying a place on the staff that previous Vice Presidents have given to their senior uniformed military aides. But since

Mr. Nixon handed Ford a specific mandate to shepherd national security legislation, Marsh says the Vice President "wanted a civilian in the post, someone who could work with political leaders in Congress, as a uniformed officer could not."

Ex-congressman Marsh, who headed the Pentagon lobbying team in 1973, was a natural for the job.

Seidman, the last of the "action group" members, is an accounting and business management expert who was called in last February to draft an operating plan for Ford's office. He has stayed on to run "administration and services," a catch-all category from speechwriting and correspondence to press and political liaison.

A second echelon of four men and a woman supplements the top team, handling more specialized functions. In these slots are:

- William E. Casselman II, 32, who, like Burrell, moved from a House staff

job to White House lobbying and now doubles in brass as Ford's counsel and his contact with the Domestic Council and other executive agencies.

- Gwen Anderson, 44, the Republican national committeewoman for the state of Washington and leader of the Nixon campaigns there in 1968 and 1972, who is the official liaison to the

Republican Party and other non-governmental groups

- Paul Miltich, 54, a former Michigan newspapers man who covered Ford in Washington and then joined his staff in his present role as press secretary in 1966.

- Warren Rustand, 31, the former president of a Tucson, Ariz., investment firm and a family friend of House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), who came to Washington last fall as a White House fellow and now heads the seven-person scheduling unit for Ford.

- Milton Friedman, 50, a Virginia-born journalist who is Ford's principal speechwriter. Friedman worked for the Jewish Telegraph Agency as its chief Washington correspondent for 21 years, before going political in 1970—first as a staff member of the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee and then as press secretary to Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.).

Mildred Leonard, who has been Ford's personal secretary for almost a quarter-century, and Philip Buchen, his former Grand Rapids law partner who now is executive director of the Domestic Council committee on the right of privacy—chaired by Ford at Mr. Nixon's request—round out the dozen most influential staff employees.

Below them, more than four dozen



Vice President Ford and his Action Group. From left: Richard T. Burress, assistant for legislative affairs; Walter L. Mote, Senate assistant; Robert T. Hartmann, chief of staff; Ford; John O. Marsh, assistant for defense affairs, and L. William Seidman, assistant for administration.

White House Photo

others worry about the logistics of vice presidential travel, the flow of paper and visitors, and the handling of the 6,000 pieces of mail that come in each week.

Handling a staff of this size is obviously something new for Ford, who had a reputation in Congress of keeping his office in his hat and relying little on staff assistance.

No one around Ford pretends that the transition has been easy, either for Ford himself or for the oldtimers on the staff accustomed to the relaxed ways.

As minority leader, Ford had only 17 employees—13 on Capitol Hill and four back in Grand Rapids. When Frank Meyer, Ford's longtime administrative assistant, died in 1972, Ford decided it was not worthwhile to replace him, since he planned to serve in the House only until 1976 himself. Meyer's salary was divided up into pay raises for the others, and "the staff had been together so long it just ran itself on momentum," Hartmann says.

From Oct. 12, when Ford was picked, until Dec. 7, when he was sworn in, virtually all the staff effort went into preparing him for the unprecedented congressional confirmation hearings.

Masses of mail had accumulated for

the untried and undermanned staff that moved into Agnew's suite of second-floor offices in the Executive Office Building last December. It was, by all accounts, a mess.

"Remember," says Mote, who had been through the process once before with Agnew, "this poor guy (Ford) hit the ground running. There was no transition time for him on his staff."

By February, Ford himself was concerned enough about the situation that he sent out a call for help. Through Buchen, who is regarded by many as his closest personal adviser, he recruited Seidman, an egg-bald businessman who had supervised the growth of his family accounting firm into one of the giants of the industry, then branched out into television, broadcasting and other enterprises.

While Seidman is a fellow resident of Grand Rapids, he had never been part of Ford's inner circle. His own past political identification was primarily with George Romney—as a losing member of the Romney ticket for auditor general in 1962, as an adviser on state governmental organization and as a troubleshooter in Romney's abortive effort to wrest the 1968 presidential nomination from Richard Nixon.

A graduate of Dartmouth and Harvard law school, an amateur polo player and maker of mobiles, Seidman shares few of the characteristics of the others on the Ford top team, whose tastes run to golf, musicals and backyard pool parties.

Nonetheless, what began as a 30-day temporary assignment to "look over the operation" has become a permanent post as the architect and—to

some extent—the executor of the staff reorganization that has been taking place.

One must put in the qualifier, because Seidman himself is at pains to identify Hartmann as "the top man" in Ford's operation. Rumors of bad blood between the two men have reached print, but both of them deny it. Others on the Ford staff blame the rumors on these same White House aides who periodically leak stories that the President is unhappy with Ford's effort to establish an independent political identity for himself.

"All efficiency experts are suspect," says Mote, "so Bill [Seidman] came in here with a cloud over him. But he's done an excellent job, and any friction in the group has been very, very minor."

"If there's any infighting on the staff," adds Hartmann, "it's not at this level. The Vice President and I picked out these people and the more authority and responsibility they assume, the

happier I'll be ... I'm certain that there is no difference between Bill Seidman and me."

And Seidman says that "what we've had has been an exchange of ideas, rather than any kind of personal feud."

Even without personality conflicts, the transition from minority leader to Vice President has been difficult. From his vantage point on Capitol Hill, Mote concedes that "a lot of people downtown feel we've done a lot of wheel-spinning," but he insists that Ford is better organized than Agnew was at a comparable point.

Many of the problems clearly have come from Ford's own desire to keep his operation personalized.

"He wants real answers written to the letters," said Seidman, "not canned replies."

"He wants to know where he's been invited, who's asking him, and who's endorsing the request," says Rustand.

That is fine, but when each day's mail brings 60 invitations and the daily phone traffic, includes about 175 appointment requests, scheduling can become a nightmare.

The solution being tried is to give Ford a daily log of all incoming requests, but also to provide him—from a weekly schedule conference of senior staff members, and the daily paring of Rustand's scheduling unit—a much reduced set of schedule choices.

"About 95 per cent of the time he agrees with our recommendations," Rustand says, "but he adds and deletes, and he has a list of commitments he's made himself."

"He's a very, very self-sufficient person," Hartmann emphasizes. "He has six or seven people working on his schedule now, but he also has his own pocket minute-minder, which he's carried all his life and if it's not in his minute-minder, it's not on his sche-

dule."

Ford's preference for dealing directly with people and problems, rather than insulating himself behind a screen of functionaries, is mentioned by everyone who works for him.

"His use of staff is characteristic of a member of Congress," says Marsh, who served eight years in the House himself. "Each of them wants to establish a personal relationship with everyone of his constituents. Obviously, you don't change that habit overnight."

"But more and more, as the staff learns its functions, you're seeing a delegation of responsibilities," Marsh adds. "Ford is a good manager. You never want to give him a piece of pa-

per thinking he won't read it. He'll read it, all right."

"He's a prodigious worker. He comes in here at 7:30 a.m. and works straight through, between appointments, on the plane, in the limousine," Marsh says. "If he leaves the office at 2 p.m. to go to Chicago for a speech and gets back at 10 p.m., we'll send the afternoon accumulation of memos and work out to the airport in the limousine that picks him up, and he'll have been through it by the time he comes in the next morning. He knows what's going on in this office."

But if Ford kows what's going on in the office, it is clear that his ears and eyes are focused even more firmly on Capitol Hill and the country. He has cut back the allocation of time for appointments from what it was six months ago, in order to get more reading and staff work done, but he is still accessible to any member of Congress of either party, by phone or in person. Every day he is in Washington, he spends several hours on Capitol Hill, either in his formal Senate office or a hideaway on the House side given the Vice President for the first time in history.

Continuing a habit of his days as minority leader, he will often leave Washington at the close of a working day, fly off to give a speech, and then fly back in order to start again the next morning at 7:30.

Accessible as Ford makes himself, he still apparently worries that the staff may begin to isolate him from his normal contacts. In a recent memo, in addition to warning his aides not to discuss intra-office differences with others, he told them "fairly bluntly," according to one assistant, "that he didn't want them enlarging themselves just because his office had changed."

That warning reinforces the lessons those staff members say they have learned on this own from what happened inside the White House during Mr. Nixon's first term.

Hartmann says, for example, that "I am the chief of staff for a guy who has been his own chief of staff and always will be. He wants to know what's going on and he doesn't want to

delegate any important part of his business. My job is not to keep people out, but to get people in, in an orderly fashion. The last thing I want to do is to be another Berlin wall."

"We want to be sure," says scheduling chief Rustand, "that we have no rigid system, that there are checks and balances, so no one has the power to say, 'I control the Vice President's time.'"

The "open door" policy is cited by staff members as the answer to outside criticism that Ford's staff does not provide the flow of ideas and information needed by someone who may someday be President. Ford has briefings every Friday on national security issues from Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger or Maj. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, of the National Security Council staff, and receives the same daily intelligence summary that goes to the President.

Every Monday, he meets with the President's chief assistants for legislation and domestic policy, William E. Timmons and Kenneth R. Cole Jr., to discuss problems and prospects in those areas, and he participates in all of the President's meetings with the congressional leaders.

Oddly, despite the importance of inflation and other economic issues, there is no regular briefing of Ford by any of the administration's principal economic officials or agencies, but he meets from time to time with Cabinet and agency officials in this field.

Beyond these formal sessions, there is a steady flow of comment to Ford from friends in Congress, the Republican Party and the private sector, as he flits from Capitol Hill to the far corners of the country.

Whether there is enough capacity on Ford's staff to give him a systematic and independent analysis of the issues on which he is speaking and acting for the administration is a matter of debate.

Richard Reeves, in a recent New York magazine article on Ford, said he has "a personal staff that can most charitably be described as being in over their collective heads."

A close friend of Ford's from his

early days in Congress, who undoubtedly would like to see him President, commented last week that "I'm not very happy with his present staff . . . He needs a couple of guys who can help think things through. These guys he's got all live day by day."

The view that Ford is suffering from intellectual anemia in his own environment is strongly rejected by his aides. "We've got legal, political, business, journalistic and military backgrounds represented on this staff," said Mote, and Miltich notes that half the senior dozen aides have written speeches for Ford in the past six months.

Burress was on his way to being a senior fellow at the Hoover Institute when Ford recruited him and Friedman was on a sabbatical at the Washington School of Psychiatry when he was called in to help bolster the speech-writing team.

Despite this, there's no indication that Ford has hired anyone on his staff as an "idea man," all those working for him have specific areas of operational responsibility. The newly instituted "action group" meetings are designed to facilitate discussion, but it is not clear how much brainstorming really goes on there. Those who attend say they have little idea about their colleagues' political or philosophical views.

Ford, who worked comfortably with both progressive and conservative Republicans in the House, has built some philosophical diversity into his staff. Despite his Arizona ties, scheduler Rustand describes himself as "moderate to liberal" and acknowledges he's always had "great admiration" for Nelson A. Rockefeller. Seidman and Friedman both come out of the progressive wing of the party, and Miltich, a political independent during all his years as a journalist, calls himself a "moderate, pragmatic Republican." Mrs. Anderson, a self-described "centrist," worked with party leaders in Washington to prevent a Birchite takeover in the 1960s, but split with her governor, Daniel J. Evans, to support Mr. Nixon over Rockefeller at the 1968 convention.