

OEO Chief

A Nixon Aide With the Inside Track

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The influence of Donald Rumsfeld has been rising and continues to rise in President Nixon's inner circle of advisers.

Rumsfeld wears two hats — assistant to the president and director of the Office of Economic Opportunity — but most bureaucrats have tended to treat him simply as the antipoverty chief.

A clear indication of Rumsfeld's power at 1600 Pennsylvania avenue is that he is now a member of the handful of aides who meet regularly over coffee at 8 a.m. to discuss Nixon's problems and plot the day ahead.

This group, which commands the attention of the astute observer if he wishes to identify the truly influential "men around Nixon," has now shrunk to six (with occasional visitors): Rumsfeld, chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, director of the Office of Management and Budget George P. Shultz, chief domestic planner John P. Ehrlichman, counsellor to the president Robert H. Finch, and national security advisor Henry A. Kissinger. Other important staffers — press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, or communications director Herbert G. Klein — join the session later.



AP Wirephoto

DONALD RUMSFELD
Adviser on the rise

MISTAKE

Rumsfeld's standing is such that two months ago, in what most observers now agree was a potentially serious mistake in judgment, he was designated by his colleagues to coordinate White House political activity this fall. Rumsfeld held the job for about two weeks, during which time he tried to convince his associates that the head of the antipoverty agency had no business accepting a visibly partisan role in political planning. His arguments finally prevailed, and Finch was given the task.

The youthful (38) attractive ex-Illinois congressman's rise has contributed to speculation among OEO staffers that he may some day leave the antipoverty agency for the less troublesome atmosphere of his White House office (down the corridor on the White House second floor from Ehrlichman'), where he is spending a considerable amount of his time.

DENIALS

Such speculation is firmly denied by all concerned, but it has been noted here that OEO is not one of the administration's favorite agencies, is likely to suffer further diminishment, and that when Daniel Patrick Moynihan leaves the White House — as he is expected to do early next year — Nixon may find himself in need of a full-time adviser on poverty and urban problems.

Such a move might also simplify Rumsfeld's life, shorten his intolerably long working day, and spare him the irony-laden task of presiding over an agency whose influence declines while his own personal clout at the White House rises.

The Middle East crisis, the unraveling of the peace talks, and the hijackings are believed to have taken a greater toll on presidential energies than is generally supposed.

ROGERS

Out in San Clemente, Secretary of State William P. Rogers confided to intimates

that he had rarely seen the President look better. But a conservative writer, Victor Lasky, who spent some time with the President last week, told friends the President looked preoccupied and tired. Touching Lasky on the arm, he asked the writer, who is headed for Israel, to extend regards to the inhabitants of a kibbutz Nixon visited several years ago and to "tell them I'm thinking of them." Despite other activities on his schedule, Nixon has been able to think of little else besides the Mideast in recent weeks.

No matter how enmeshed he becomes in the intricacies of diplomacy, however, Nixon can find some relief in what seems to be an increasingly popular (or at least increasingly well-publicized) institution at the White House. It is called the "open hour" — a break in the presidential routine when, at noon, Nixon spends 50 or 60 minutes in his office greeting visitors who have little or no discernible connection with the great affairs of state.

One day this week, for instance, this extraordinary assemblage (each of whom got about five minutes of presidential time) included: the owners of a minority-owned firm in Florida that manufactures American flags; the president of Rotary International; a departing White House staff member; an incoming White House staff member; the president of the Export-Import Bank; an outgoing assistant secretary of the Department of Transportation; and the president of the machine tool association. Photographs were dutifully taken of each episode.

Out in San Clemente, where things are more relaxed, the "open hour" takes on the flavor of an afternoon at Central Casting. One day a few weeks ago, Nixon greeted a 13-year-old girl who had tackled drug abuse in her home town in California; a 104-year-old admiral; a fellow who had painted a picture of President Eisenhower; the mayor of Whittier, Nixon's boyhood home; and the officers of the San Onofre Surfing Club.

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