

Peter Flanigan, the White House Jack-of-All Trades: A 'Problem Solver' to Admirers, a 'Fixer' to Critics

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 19—

To his admirers, Peter M. Flanigan is a skilled "problem solver." To his critics, the White House aide is a manipulating "fixer."

Mr. Flanigan is assistant to President Nixon for international economic affairs, the President's chief utility player on a team of specialists and the senior White House aide who has perhaps been least in the public eye.

But Mr. Flanigan's name has come to public attention with allegations that he was involved in the settlement of an antitrust action against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, a settlement that some critics say was favorable to I.T.T.

Senator Thomas F. Eagleton, Democrat of Missouri, charged last week that Mr. Flanigan had a hand in four earlier contro-

versial decisions in which, Mr. Eagleton said, the interests of big businesses rather than the public were served.

So far, Mr. Flanigan's position as one of the President's half-dozen most trusted aides has "absolutely not" been damaged by the accusations, according to a White House official. Mr. Flanigan has been publicly defended by Senator Norris Cotton, Republican of New Hampshire, and Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary.

But whether Mr. Flanigan will appear before Congressional committees to answer the charges, as Senator Eagleton challenged him to do, could not be determined. The White House staff has traditionally been shielded from such interrogations by executive privilege.

Mr. Flanigan himself was not available to comment on the allegations or to discuss his role in the Administration. White House officials said they doubted that he would be until the I.T.T. issue had been resolved.

Even so, a picture of Mr. Flanigan, his powers and the way he exercises it was pieced together from conversations with administration officials, bureaucrats, businessmen and Congressional sources, both friends and adversaries.

Decisive and Driving

There was much agreement that Mr. Flanigan, who is 48 years old, is an intelligent, confident, articulate, decisive, driving and sometimes impatient and brusque executive.

"You don't get sleepy in his meetings," said a former associate. "If you're on Page 8 of a report and someone says 'let's go back to Page 3,' you're likely to have to scrape Pete off the chandelier."

There was also general agreement that Mr. Flanigan's work meets with the full approval of the President. "His star hasn't been rising," said an administration insider. "His star was there from the beginning."

Mr. Flanigan's influence throughout the Administration also stems from his having recruited more than 300 senior officials. "If he got you your job," said one, "you'd listen to him, wouldn't you?"

Bureaucrats recognize that Mr. Flanigan has "clout." One veteran of several Administrations said, "His telephone call is one of the few meaningful

calls around here. A lot of guys in the White House are not taken seriously. But you never ignore Flanigan."

There was further agreement that Mr. Flanigan was the most influential official in the Administration on critical issues that affect businessmen.

"He's the guy who people in our industry turn to," said a steel executive. "And we wouldn't turn to him unless he came through."

One bureaucrat said, "When there's something that affects an entire industry, the word is always 'Check it with Flanigan.' He harkens to the powerful interests and he wants to know where it's going to pinch."

An official in the Department of Commerce said that, at the top, "the business community pays no attention to this department; if you have a policy problem, you go see Peter Flanigan—and he is available."

"Peter Flanigan," the official said with a sigh, "is to the Department of Commerce what Henry Kissinger is to the Department of State."

On the question of whether Mr. Flanigan exercises his power within the limits of propriety, there was wide disagreement. Some argued that he used his influence merely to execute the President's policies. Others contended that he used it often for the political gain of the Administration or himself.

A businessman close to the Administration dismissed criticism of Mr. Flanigan as "political character assassination." He said, "Pete is not serving anyone except his judgment."

"He's a quick study in how to get things done," the executive said. "He would disapprove a businessman's request just as rapidly as he would approve it. I've met plenty of businessmen who are disgruntled about Peter Flanigan."

'Master of Compromise'

Democratic critics on Capitol Hill gave the opposite assessment. "Flanigan is a manipulator of the first order," said one. "He's a master of the compromise that works out best for vested interests."

A bureaucrat, who has watched Mr. Flanigan in action took a third view. He doubted that Mr. Flanigan had done anything for personal gain. "It was much more for political gain," he asserted.

"You have to understand how the bureaucracy works and how business is done here," he continued. "It's very subtle, very discreet. You create an atmosphere, a relationship, a series of debts, a series of understandings."

"There are political payoffs all the time," the bureaucrat said. "But nothing is written down. Things don't have to be said. Most things are left unsaid and there are just 'understandings.' Anyone who looks for specific deals is just naive."

Before coming to Washington, Mr. Flanigan was a highly successful investment banker with the Wall Street firm of Dillon, Read & Co. He was in the top level of Mr. Nixon's

1968 campaign staff and was the chief personnel talent scout at the beginning of the Administration.

According to an Administration insider, however, Mr. Flanigan was reluctant to come to Washington. "He wanted to stay in business," he said. "Pete didn't have any romantic notions about working in Washington."

But, the source said, "he was put under a great deal of pressure by the President and by Haldeman." H. R. Haldeman is one of Mr. Nixon's top assistants. Thus, Mr. Flanigan joined the Administration in April, 1969.

In an Administration of systematically delineated responsibilities, Mr. Flanigan became the White House generalist with a roving mandate. He continued to recruit political appointees, supervised the White House's relations with the Federal regulatory agencies that affect much of American economic life, looked after the President's consumer affairs program, and got his hands on the valve of the Administration's oil policy.

Special Assignments

In addition, Mr. Flanigan has taken on numerous "one-time" assignments. He headed the staff work on the President's governmental reorganization plan, persuaded steel companies to roll back prices after they had announced an



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increase and worked on draft reform and the all-volunteer army.

Mr. Flanigan also brought securities executives into a meeting with the President for a pep talk when the stock market was depressed, drew up a plan to revitalize the nation's merchant marine, persuaded the Civil Aeronautics Board to permit an air fare increase that it initially opposed, got the Italian shoe industry to adopt import restrictions to limit competition with American shoe makers, and tried to negotiate a textile import limitation with the Japanese.

After Mr. Flanigan was

named assistant to the President for international economic affairs last month, he retained most of his earlier responsibilities. Recruiting has been assigned to a lower-ranking White House aide, Fred Malek, but Mr. Flanigan still has considerable say on who is brought into the Administration.