

Agnew stripped of two key aides when he could use them most

WASHINGTON—The White House has decreed an important reduction in Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's tiny personal staff which will strip him of long-time aides J. Roy Goodearle and Herbert Thompson—a move certain to be interpreted as a sign of Agnew's political decline.

Agnew has had at least two conversations with President Nixon since the election, but the staff reductions ordered by White House major domo H.R. "Bob" Haldeman and former personnel chief Frederick Malek apparently were not discussed.

Rather, the vice president's staff was "routinely" ordered to be trimmed down as part of Mr. Nixon's overall staff reduction inside the White House. Many key White House staffers, however, were promoted to high jobs in cabinet-level departments and remain closely linked to the White House operation. That is not true of Goodearle, who has been Agnew's political liaison chief, and Thompson, a speechwriter who was Agnew's press secretary as governor of Maryland. They will stay in government, but in non-political jobs.

These involuntary staff reductions coincide with the voluntary departure of Press Secretary Vic Gold, who is quitting to write a book. Agnew's political staff, never one of his strengths, is now weaker than ever at a moment ripe for building a national operation aiming toward the 1976 presidential nomination.

More important, all this casts new doubts on the President's congeniality to-

ward Agnew. Republican politicians aware of the staff reductions say privately Mr. Nixon would have demonstrated normal courtesy toward Agnew by exempting the vice president's small staff from personnel cuts in the overblown White House staff.

They quickly add Mr. Nixon himself may not even know about the cuts. The mere fact they were ordered by Haldeman, however, is evidence that Agnew's standing with the White House palace guard is chilly at the very least.

Wall Street cowboys

A major House Ways and Means Committee investigation which may tie booming cattle operations of "Wall Street cowboys" to soaring beef prices is being quietly planned by chairman Wilbur Mills.

Mills worries that tax benefits originally written for low-bracket farmers are being used by high-bracket city slickers in a way that bids up beef prices. Therefore, in his tax reform hearings, Mills will dig into the law now permitting enormous tax deductions—sometimes exceeding 100 per cent—covering the entire cost of feed for feeder cattle fattened on the range or in feeder lots. For Wall Street farmers, these deductions produce large and immediate tax savings.

Mills is concerned that the growing capital now moving into the cattle-fattening business as a tax shelter may be bidding up the price of the finished product—an argument he may use to close one of the oldest and biggest loopholes in the tax code.