

Ford's Drive to Spread the Power

By Clifton Daniel
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President Ford wants the power of the White House dispersed. He wants it to be more widely shared with government agencies and departments and with Congress.

That is the impression gained yesterday from conversations with several of the President's closest advisers, including members of the team that is studying the problems of transition from one administration to another.

Donald Rumsfeld, coordinator of the team, emphasized that it had not concluded its studies and said it would be premature to forecast its conclusions.

However, another White House aide suggested that one general theme of the team's report would be "decentralization" of the White House, to restore some authority to government agencies and departments.

Rogers C. B. Morton, secretary of the interior, who is a member of the transition group, said the panel was trying to cut through the whole "Nixon style" of operations. He described that as a self-contained style, that tended to hold everything in the office of the President.

One of the principal instruments of centralization in the Nixon White House was the Office of Budget and Management, whose director is Roy L. Ash. Two

officials predicted yesterday that Ash would not stay with the Ford administration very long.

Morton remarked that the OMB had "been boring holes below the waterline" in government agencies and departments. By this he meant that OMB officials had been put into departments and agencies at middle levels, where they made policy decisions that were enforced by the OMB before the agency head or cabinet officer could make his own decision. That presumably will stop in the Ford administration.

Also, there are expected to be significant changes before

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the end of the year in the cabinet that Mr. Ford inherited from Mr. Nixon. His advisory group would be disappointed if they were not.

"The main thing is it should be a Ford administration," one of the President's advisers said yesterday.

Mr. Ford, it is reliably reported, is also being advised to replace Alexander M. Haig Jr., who was made White House chief of staff by Mr. Nixon. That is said to be difficult, however, because Ford is grateful to Haig for "walking that line between loyalty to the President and responsibility to the country" in the last days of the Nixon presidency.

Moreover, Mr. Ford does not have a ready-made chief of staff. Rumsfeld has been proposed for the job, but he emphatically rejected it yesterday.

"Any suggestion I'll be joining the White House staff is absolutely inaccurate," he said. "There has been no such discussion, and I have no such intention."

Rumsfeld, who is U.S. ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels, said he expected

the report of Mr. Ford's transition team to be finished Tuesday.

Planning for the transition from Mr. Nixon to Mr. Ford began at a meeting last Wednesday, August 7, the day before Mr. Nixon resigned. The meeting was held at the home of William G. Whyte, a vice president of the United States Corporation, who has known Mr. Ford for more than 20 years and is a close family friend. The meeting was held in

a private house because "it was a matter of good taste at the time," Whyte said. Mr. Nixon having not yet resigned.

The session, which began at 5 p.m. and continued until midnight, was called by Philip W. Buchen, Mr. Ford's former law partner and perhaps his most intimate adviser.

Beside Buchen and Whyte, those present were Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, assistant Republican leader of the Senate; Bryce Harlow, vice president of the Proctor and Gamble Co. in Washington, and former counselor to Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon; Representative John W. Byrnes, (Rep-Wis.); Clay T. Whitehead, who recently resigned as head of the White House office of telecommunications policy. Whitehead, youngest of the group, is serving as executive secretary of the transition team.

Former Governor William W. Scranton of Pennsylvania joined the discussion about 7 o'clock.

The groups first decision was to recommend that Mr. Ford appoint J. F. terHorst of the Detroit News as White House press secretary to replace Ronald L. Ziegler.

Griffin had a hand in that, and he was also asked to get Chief Justice Warren Burger back from a vacation in Amsterdam to swear in the new President. The Chief Justice told his assistant, who told the senator, "I don't think I should start back unless there is something official." When Mr. Nixon's resignation was official, Burger returned.

There were reports that Mr. Nixon wanted to attend the swearing in, but the transition planners were strongly against it.

"It would be in the national interest," one of them said, "to have a definite break that would involve some period of time. Our general advice was to move as quickly as possible to put a Ford imprint on the presidency."

The meeting decided on the transition team, to consist of Morton, Scranton, Rumsfeld and former Representative John O. Marsh (Dem-Va.).

The second meeting of the secret transition planners took place Thursday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and lasted until Griffin had to go to the White House for Mr. Nixon's tearful farewell to the congressional leadership.

The four-man transition team now meets every morning at 7:15 with Mr. Ford's personal advisers. Usually including Griffin and Buchen.