

Pressure on Finch

Nixon's Protege Appears Blocked As Support at White House Wanes

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WASHINGTON, May 19—In 1946, a 20-year-old college senior and former Marine named Robert H. Finch first met Richard M. Nixon, a Congressional aspirant then in his first political campaign. A friendship developed and Mr. Finch has loyally followed Mr. Nixon for almost a quarter of a century since then. But observers here are saying that the pressures of loyalty have begun to tell on Mr. Nixon's Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, who entered the Walter Reed Army Hospital yesterday for treatment of a puzzling numbness in his left arm.

News Analysis

Over the years, it has been Mr. Nixon, a dozen years the elder who led, guided and supported Mr. Finch politically. But the questions being asked in the hallways and offices of the Health, Education and Welfare Department are: What has Richard M. Nixon done for Robert H. Finch recently to preserve his continued loyalty? Has the President left his protégé out on a limb with nowhere to go?

A Post Hard to Resign

Before Mr. Finch accepted the Cabinet job, he reportedly declined the No. 2 spot on the Republican national ticket. Most bright, young, ambitious Vice Presidents have been unhappy at being in the shadow of the President. It is also hard to resign from the Vice-Presidency. Only John C. Calhoun did it, 138 years ago, because he had won a Senate seat.

It seems unlikely that Mr. Finch would ever leave President Nixon in the lurch the way Calhoun left President Jackson, who on his deathbed said he should have hanged his erstwhile Vice President. Yet it has been the Senate that Mr. Finch has sought.

Mr. Finch's political aspirations two years ago were focused ahead on the senatorial campaign in California this fall. Senator George Murphy was suffering from cancer and there was a good chance that he would not seek re-election. But he has done so, despite pleas from many high Republicans that he step down and make room for Mr. Finch. Polls in California give Mr. Finch a better chance of winning than Mr. Murphy.

In the last year, Secretary Finch has repeatedly said that he would not push his political dream by usurping Mr. Murphy's seat. The two men are friends, and six years ago Mr. Finch directed Mr. Murphy's campaign.

Should Mr. Finch run for the House of Representatives? He tried in 1952 and 1954 and lost both times. Perhaps a shot at the California governorship nomination? But Gov. Ronald Reagan has already announced that he will run for a second four-year term.

Politically, Mr. Finch seems to be stymied. Barring unforeseen events, he has only the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and all its

tremendous problems. But, more important, his White House support is waning.

The first clue came last year after Mr. Finch chose Dr. John H. Knowles, head of the Massachusetts General Hospital as an Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs. Mr. Nixon countermanded the choice under pressure from the American Medical Association and the late Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen.

Swallows His Words

Mr. Finch was so angry in the political infighting that he said he would resign if he didn't get Dr. Knowles. He was forced to swallow the statement.

There have been less open and dramatic instances that underscore the undercutting of Mr. Finch by the White House. Unlike Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, Mr. Finch still sees Mr. Nixon frequently. Yet he apparently has less influence on the President than in years past, if he ever had such influence. After all, it has been Mr. Nixon who has led the younger, less experienced Mr. Finch, not vice versa.

In domestic affairs Mr. Nixon has increasingly relied upon the advice of Attorney General Nixon has increasingly relied upon the advice of Attorney General John N. Mitchell and the upper echelon of the White House staff.

Several of Mr. Finch's predecessors as Secretary have said that decisions on the nation's social issues, normally the province of Mr. Finch and his department, are being made by White House aides.

Leon E. Panetta, Mr. Finch's chief civil rights aide, resigned last February, then charged that his ouster had been ordered by a conservative cabal at the White House. Mr. Panetta said his vigorous school desegregation efforts conflicted with Republican attempts to woo Southern voters.

Conservative Gets Post

John D. Ehrlichman, the President's principal domestic aide, has emerged as a power in the administration of national affairs, somewhat eclipsing Mr. Finch. Earlier this month the establishment of a special White House committee dealing with welfare and family assistance was announced by Mr. Finch. Mr. Ehrlichman, a conservative, was named its chairman, Mr. Finch merely a member.

When a cabinet panel on school desegregation was appointed in February, the White House appointed Robert C. Mardian as its executive director. A conservative and a worker for Senator Barry Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign, Mr. Mardian was not overly friendly with Mr. Finch. Mr. Mardian was the department's general counsel, but not Mr. Finch's choice for that post.

Mr. Finch's department is the ideological battleground of the Nixon Administration, and Mr. Finch has not only been caught in the crossfire but has also been on the losing side recently. This may have accounted for the tremendous strain that has been put on him in the last few months.

He looked haggard and drawn even before he entered Walter Reed. Today he was reported to be improving, but all his appointments were canceled through Sunday.