

A Cabinet Change With Questions

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 7—It is said here of the Cabinet job that President Nixon has now transferred from Robert H. Finch to Elliott L. Richardson that whoever holds it for any length of time is bound to grow in education and to diminish in both health and welfare.

The title itself is formidable: Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. The Department's acronym around Washington is hardly edifying: HEW. It takes up more space in the phone book than any department except Defense and its three major divisions probably have less to do with each other even than the Army, Navy and Air Force at the Pentagon.

Though only 17 years old, HEW employs 110,000 people and spends more than \$50-billion. It houses—and tries to run—the Office of Education, the Environmental Control Administration, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Air Pollution Control Administration, The Health Services and Health Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Public Health Service, the Social and Rehabilitation Service, the Children's Bureau, the Social Security Administration and much, much more.

Politics and Finances

Besides administering nearly 300 major Federal programs of services in these fields, the department must design and win support for national strategies to aid and desegregate education, deliver health services and provide financial assistance to the old, the infirm and the poor. Accordingly it must wage perpetual political and budget battles both inside the executive branch and with Congress.

Secretary Finch never pretended to like the job and openly yearned to follow one of his unhappy predecessors, Abraham A. Ribicoff of Connecticut, to the Senate. But George Murphy insisted on running for re-election in California and Mr. Finch, shut out, refused to challenge him directly.

He did not like the administrative burdens at HEW. He did not like the constant tension between loyalty to the demanding bureaucracy below and to the Presidency above. He did not like waging visible battles for the great domestic programs against other arms of the Government and often against the White House itself.

And as an old associate and confidante of Mr. Nixon he cannot have enjoyed the conspicuous loss of so many of those battles—from the early effort to hire Dr. John H. Knowles to manage the health programs to the recent effort to save Leon E. Panetta in his civil rights office.

A personable and sensible

New Role for Finch Among the Issues Left Unsettled

kind of political operator, Mr. Finch did not enjoy his reputation as the "house liberal" in the Nixon Administration. But he was responsible for liberal programs and accountable to liberal subordinates, clients, constituencies and Congressmen, and he felt obliged to press their claims.

Proud and Confused

He was proud of what he did achieve in a time of tight budgets and strong assault from the right political wing of his party. But he was consumed by the battle, confused by the roles he had to play and ineffective when he wished to compete with Attorney General John N. Mitchell or Vice President Agnew in shaping the broader tone of the Administration.

How much he was consumed became physically apparent a month ago after the Cambodia invasion and the shootings at Kent and Jackson and the internal struggle over Mr. Agnew's inflammatory rhetoric. On the very day that several thousand of Mr. Finch's employees wanted him to lead their cause against his own President and to account for Administration policy to them, he drew up with a puzzling numbness in his arm, forcing a brief hospitalization and an extended rest.

So it was probably not too difficult to persuade him to "come home," as Mr. Finch put it, to Mr. Nixon's personal staff of counselors and to his own circle of friendships, forged in the many Nixon campaigns.

Less clear in this first Nixon Cabinet shift, however, are the motives of the President and the other friends of Mr. Finch who arranged it. It may be that they wanted simply to accommodate their ailing associate, to relieve him of distasteful pressures and simultaneously to give new zest to their most troubled department of government.

But the shift may also reflect the feeling by the President that he has neglected the moderate and compassionate elements of his party and that he hopes, after the turmoil of the last month, to obtain a new perspective on many of his policies, foreign as well as domestic. Time alone will tell whether Mr. Nixon wants to feel a new influence and how Mr. Finch might exert it.

Only time will show, also, how Mr. Richardson intends to tame the HEW monster. He is a man of extraordinarily tidy thought, which he expresses with slow deliberation, usually while doodling complicated but clear and neatly balanced forms

in the tradition of modern op art.

As Undersecretary of State over the last 16 months, Mr. Richardson amazed much of Washington with his swift mastery of nuclear technology and the issues of arms control, the diplomatic history of the Vietnam negotiations and dozens of other previously unfamiliar subjects. In the process he demonstrated a rare combination of intellectual subtlety and bureaucratic agility.

He brought new hope to dispirited Foreign Service officers who had missed firm departmental leadership and a concern for their problems. At the same time, through his close relationship with Henry A. Kissinger of the President's staff, Mr. Richardson became the State Department's most solid link to the White House policy apparatus.

There is no one at the State Department who would dispute Secretary of State William P. Rogers's contention that he is losing his "right arm"—and at a time when departmental spirits are sagging again. Mr. Rogers has indicated that he will look outside the Government for a replacement, but it will be difficult for a newcomer to master the material and to find his place quickly in an Administration whose work habits are already fixed.

Mr. Nixon's top aides are certainly acquiring the "extra dimensions" that he rated so highly in first presenting his Cabinet a year and a half ago. The President has a former Attorney General, Mr. Rogers, at State, and a health and education expert, Melvin R. Laird, at Defense. George Romney, at Housing and Urban Development, has been sounding off about the war and the economy. Walter J. Hickel, at Interior, has claimed a special knowledge of youth. George P. Shultz, at Labor, has already had a conspicuous hand in everything from welfare to oil import policy. And now a foreign policy expert moves to HEW, and Mr. Finch, who might have become Vice President, is being given a chance to compete with Mr. Agnew on the inside track.

But at the center of influence over both foreign and domestic policies there has so far been no rival for Attorney General Mitchell, and that is the relationship that will now be studied to detect the real significance of this weekend's changes.