

Finch Thrives as Nixon's

By Don Bacon
Newsweek Service

WASHINGTON — President Nixon really meant it when he said he needed Bob Finch.

After less than three weeks as counselor to the President, the former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare has become one of the busiest people around Nixon—and potentially the most influential.

Freed from the impossible loyalty conflict he faced in trying to run HEW, Finch has turned to his new assignment with a gusto that has impressed not only his old friend Nixon, but outsiders as well.

Responsibilities

And Nixon, finding that Finch fills a void on his staff, has continued to pile up his work and responsibilities.

Finch was, as Secretary an Administration liability. Pressed by the HEW bureaucracy, he found himself agitating for social and welfare programs opposed by the White House. As Presidential advisor he is a definite asset. This has surprised, but apparently not angered, other key Nixon advisers.

Some thought at first that Finch's new assignment was to be a way station to oblivion. The opposite seems to be the case as Nixon con-

tinues to expand his friend's role.

Seemingly without stepping on the sensitive toes of other key aides — Ehrlichman, Shultz, Haldeman, Harlow, Moynihan, et al — Finch also fills a vacuum that has long needed filling: he is a friend and confidant.

Rebozo Listens

Nixon's Florida neighbor, Bebe Rebozo, has served inadequately in that capacity. A good listener, Bebe is admittedly ignorant of politics and government. Unlike Finch, he is neither qualified nor disposed to advise or criticize the President.

The Nixon staff has been, until Finch, short on men who can relax after hours and who can bring out the President's latent, but real, humanness. It was Finch, in his first days back at Nixon's side, who persuaded the President to create a large



ROBERT H. FINCH
He filled a need

aid program for victims of the Peruvian earthquake.

It will be Finch also who advises Nixon in the future on a wide range of domestic and foreign issues, especially on education, youth and urban affairs.

Liaison de Luxe

For Finch, Nixon seems to have a role in mind not far from the one he originally envisioned for his Vice President — to serve as the President's personal liaison with outside groups and commissions and to represent the

President at informal White House "skull sessions."

Finch was Nixon's first choice to be his 1968 running mate, but too many obstacles, including a political debt to the South, interfered.

With his deep voice and boyish grin, the likeable, 45-year-old Robert Hutchinson Finch has lately been the most visible man at the White House, aside from Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler.

He has easy access to the President's Oval Office, which is only a few steps from his own on the second floor, and he has already become a familiar figure in the White House corridors as he scurries from meeting to conference to press briefing.

In a three-day period last week, the President assigned Finch: to serve as his liaison to the Presidential Commission on Campus Violence, to be coordinator of an emergency program to aid Peruvian earthquake victims, to substitute for the President at a White House meeting of college presidents, and to brief reporters of no fewer than five occasions.

Finch has been asked also to attend the so-called

Chief Confidant

"morning meetings," a daily gathering of the elite mem-

bers of the President's staff. The President seldom sits in;

perhaps now he won't even need to.

In addition, Nixon asked Finch to join him this coming week in San Clemente, Calif. The California vacation will provide a meaningful test of Finch's true standing with the President, at least as sig-

nificant as the recent weekend they spent in Florida and the Bahamas re-establishing their 23-year friendship.

For some reason, there has been no one on the Nixon staff — until Finch joined — with whom Nixon really felt comfortable.