

The Nixon Firings

By Don Bacon

WASHINGTON—(NNS) — In carefully chosen phrases, President Nixon has been telling the departing members of his first administration just how much he hates to see them go.

Many first term appointees, whose resignations Nixon has accepted, have been able to estimate their worth to the President by the ton of his sendoffs.

The subtle shading of each departure statement issued by the White House is intentional and designed to convey Nixon's exact feeling about the individual, according to a White House source involved in the process.

Since he began his second term reorganization, he has been accepting resignations with several degrees of "regret" — ranging all the way from "a deep sense of personal regret" down to no regret at all.

Some officials are departing with only "gratitude" for past services. A few are being let go, it would appear from the White House announcements, with pleasure.

The President, it is understood, personally decides the key phrasing of each resignation statement.

Nixon voiced "special regret" in accepting the resignations last month of two Cabinet secretaries — James Hodgson of Labor and George Romney of Housing and Urban Development — but he withheld that language from two other departing Cabinet members — Peter Peterson of Commerce and John Volpe of transportation.

Volpe, who was asked to relinquish his post and ac-

There's a fine, subtle touch to President's letters accepting departure of top officials

cept the ambassadorship to Italy, did hear from Nixon "warm praise for the job (he) has done."

Peterson, also asked to resign, got no accolades from the President.

Once one of the bright young men of the administration, Peterson's sendoff contained not even a thank you. The Commerce secretary was offered an overseas "special ambassadorship," an obvious demotion, which he refused. Whereupon White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler simply announced last month that "Pete Peterson plans to return to private life."

So subtle are the differences in many of the announcements that it is often impossible to determine which ranks higher on Nixon's personal scale.

'Special Regret'

Two other departees — Robert Brown of the White House staff and director Frank Shakespeare of U.S. Information Agency — have rated the President's "special regret."

But almost as honorific was the "deep regret" Nixon voiced at the leaving of Mark Goode, his personal television consultant, and the "great regret" he had for the departure of Preston Martin, chairman of the

Federal Home Loan Bank board.

Nixon felt "a deep sense of personal regret" over the departure of HUD assistant Secretary Harold Finger, "sincere personal regret" when White House aide John Nidecker resigned and "very special regret" when assistant Secretary of State David Abshire decided to leave.

White House aide Charles SColson, who has been close to the President for the past three years, is being let go by the President with plain "regret," while another key White House aide, Harry Dent, has only the President's "appreciation."

Treasury Undersecretary Charles Walker and Assistant Treasury Secretary Eugene Rossides can enjoy knowing the President accepted their resignations "with reluctance and regret."

Ziegler said yesterday the President had accepted "with deep regret" the resignations of four assistant defense secretaries, but in a later statement he toned down the President's apparent feelings to "deep appreciation." The press secretary also noted, as he seldom does, that the four were leaving "at their request."

Several departees earned

the President's "appreciation" for their first term performances, a few rated his "deep appreciation," but only one — White House aide Alexander Butterfield — had his "deepest appreciation."

Director Richard Helms of the Central Intelligence Agency got eased out warmly — "with greatest respect and deepest appreciation" — but there was no indication of presidential regret.

Regret was also lacking in a number of other departure announcements, particularly those involving assistant secretaries at the Justice and Transportation departments.

Louis Bruce, commissioner of Indian affairs, got perhaps the coldest good-bye. Ziegler would say only that Bruce "will be leaving his post" and refused under questioning to add any expression of presidential sadness or appreciation.