

Ehrlichman Sees Nixon

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

As he embarked on his second term in the White House on Jan. 20, President Nixon presented to each of his Cabinet members and senior staff aides a brown leather date book—a day-to-day calendar for the next four years.

Next to the date Jan. 20 are printed the words "1,461 Days Remaining"—indicating the time left in the Nixon administration. On each succeeding date, the number drops by one. The date book bears this introduction signed by the President:

"Every moment of history is a fleeting time, precious and unique. The presidential term which begins today consists of 1,461 days; no more, no less. Each can be a day of strengthening and renewal for America. Each can add depth and dimension to the American experience.

"The 1,461 days which lie ahead are but a short interval in the flowing stream of history. Let us live them to the hilt, working everyday to achieve these goals. If we strive together, if we make the most of the challenge and the opportunity these days offer us, they can stand out as great days for America and great moments in the history of mankind."

John D. Ehrlichman, assistant to the President for domestic affairs, thumbed through his own copy of the date book the other day during a one-hour interview in his West Wing office.

The President, he said, "moves along at a much faster pace than he did when he first came here. He is aware of the fact that there are only 1,400 days left in his presidency and he is working to get things done within that 1,400-day span.

"The point of this date book is that we not only have to get things started but we have to organize our work to get them finished.

"The focus here is not only on fielding the short hops that come from the Congress and attacking the immediate problems but also charting a work-flow, so to speak, that will stretch over that relatively brief time span and will bring into fruition some 1,400-day goals that he has set. He has the bicentennial very much in mind, and that is sort of a similar aspect of this second term adding to the realization of a finite number of days remaining."

Mindful of his now-limited tenure, Ehrlichman said, Mr. Nixon has geared himself and his administration to carry through his reshap-

ing of domestic policy and instruments by the end of his second term. And the controversy raised in the process, Ehrlichman said, is all to the good because it forces discussion and hard choices in Congress and city halls around the country. To make optimum use of the time, Ehrlichman said, the President has been pacing himself better, taking a day off when he can. "He uses those times to do reading at his own pace, and our work flow goes better," his chief domestic policy assistant said.

At the same time, Ehrlichman said, the President—free of the time-consuming and sensitive Vietnam peace negotiations—is seeing more of his Cabinet, more members of Congress and holding more press conferences.

Underlining the President's consciousness of the limited time he has, Ehrlichman said, is the White House and executive branch reorganization, under which Ehrlichman is one of five prime staff assistants, with three Cabinet members also functioning as presidential counselors.

The counselors—Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Caspar W. Weinberger (for human resources), Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz (for natural resources) and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development James T. Lynn (for community development)—each has a separate office and small staff in the Executive Office Building.

They have been meeting once or twice a week as a group with the President under an agenda structured by Ehrlichman as well as handling individual policy-development responsibilities such as welfare reform (Weinberger), housing replacement proposals (Lynn) and energy and farm proposals (Butz).

When Cabinet members or agency heads have policy matters to discuss that come within the purview of one of the three counselors, Ehrlichman said, they channel them through the appropriate one. On operational questions of major importance, they see the President directly.

As in every administration, the question of who sees the President most often always is a public and press yardstick of power, and the reorganization has adjusted the matter of access to him.

Some, like H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, the President's White House chief of staff, continue to see Mr. Nixon several times a day as they did in the first term.

Others, like Ehrlichman, who has turned over the job of executive director of the Domestic Council to Kenneth Cole, now works more on policy overview, seeing the President frequently but not necessarily daily. Cole now is responsible for the daily operational contact with the President on matters before the Domestic Council.

A week ago Friday, for instance, Ehrlichman spent about three hours with Mr. Nixon reviewing several large subjects. "That's better for him," Ehrlichman said, "it's better for me if we can sit down and do that rather than trying to compress things into half an hour a day on a regular daily basis."

But access to the President is not so much the yardstick of power as is responsibility delegated by him, Ehrlichman said.

"I have trouble in defining this power currency that I hear about," he said. "The President is a delegator. That's one of his strengths, that he can freely delegate responsibility. And he does not restrict his delegation to the people that he sees the most frequently, so I don't think that equation can be proved in this administration."

Among those who are being delegated the most responsibility in the second term, he said—but not exclusively these—are Secretary of the Treasury George P. Shultz, who also functions as one of the five presidential assistants, Cole, Peter M. Flanigan, in the field of international economics, budget director Roy L. Ash and deputy director Frederick V. Malek. Obviously, all five top assistants and the counselors are in this category.

Of Shultz, for example, Ehrlichman said: "George carries very heavy and diverse responsibilities—by delegation. He sees the President whenever he needs to, but he's extremely conservative of the President's time. He doesn't run in there just to be logging hours on the schedule. He only comes in when he feels he must.

"And the President works a lot on the phone. He works a lot by memo. I'll pick up three, four memos a morning from overnight dictation. Well, to the extent that we can operate on that basis, we don't need the President's personal time."

In the second Nixon administration, a major thrust of domestic policy has been the President's determination to shift to the states and localities many of the social welfare programs

as a Time-Conscious



United Press International

"The President is a delegator. That's one of his strengths . . ."

heretofore conducted from Washington, with help to the local level through special revenue sharing.

This thrust, and the controversial decision to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity by shifting anti-poverty programs to other agencies and withdrawing federal money from community action agencies around the country, have put the administration's battle plan under considerable public debate.

That is beneficial, Ehrlichman said. "We're going through a time when at least we've got everybody's attention and when a great many people are focusing on whether or not these programs in their communities have or have not worked," he said. "That's good, to my way of thinking.

"This whole process of revenue sharing is the same thing. If special revenue sharing for community development, the so-called Better Communities Act, is adopted, then local communities are going to have to decide which of the various categorical programs they want to perpetuate in their local communities, and which they think should be laid aside so that the money

can be used for higher priorities.

"We would like to see this next four years be a time of re-examination of all these tax-supported efforts, aimed at the solution of community problems.

"And we don't think it's a bad thing for people to challenge one another, to challenge their assumptions, to challenge their facts—and make these priority decisions then at the lowest possible level of government, where the most number of people can interact in the decision."

The fact that there has been loud opposition from some mayors and governors to the administration's new domestic thrust is "completely understandable," Ehrlichman said, because the formal legislation on special revenue sharing is not ready yet. But when they see it, he said, their fears will be alleviated.

"Until we can give them chapter and verse on special revenue sharing, had them the bills, let them take them back and let their budget people examine them in the light of their own individual situations," he said, "I certainly don't criticize any of them for expressing concern."

Special efforts will be made through the Domestic Council staff and various special-interest groups in Washington to provide all pertinent information, including tax implications, he said. But already mayors are coming around, he said.

"More and more of them have gone back from the mayors' conference, sat down with their budget people and have called in and said, 'Well, I guess the concerns that I have may not prove out,'" Ehrlichman said.

Misunderstandings over the moratorium on new housing starts, program termination notices from HEW for temporary budget reasons and the like have contributed to the concern, he said, but "some of these things are gradually being sorted out and we're seeing a climate of patience, and sort of inherent acceptance, subject to final numbers coming out."

"A few mayors have political ambitions and are using the period of uncertainty as a springboard for their own political futures. Others are very reasonably biding their time . . ."

The difficulty of transition from existing federal aid programs for the cities to special revenue sharing, which has been a major concern of city halls, is one on which the administration has invited complaints.

Mayors' concerns that a cutback in federally supported youth activities could cause trouble this summer, for example, were answered Wednesday by a White House announcement of a \$424 million program for summer youth, a \$3-million increase over last year. The new money, however, will provide for only 776,000 summer jobs, compared to 812,000 last summer.

"We're trying to tailor solutions to the transitional problems of those individual communities that do have significant problems," Ehrlichman said, "But there will be some situations where quite honestly there won't be anything we can do for them. Summer youth, however, will not be one of them."

As for the decision to dismantle OEO and its impact, Ehrlichman said the staff work on it took place "within the budgetary context almost entirely" after a review of various agencies' performance by then budget director Weinberger ordered by the President last year.

The community action agency program was found to be "very, very negative on any measurable standard," he said, not only on cost-effectiveness but because it had "so many manifest abuses" resulting from "a lack of accountability and a lack of proper management arrangements."

OEO as a whole was the subject of a budget office study to determine how "the worthwhile activities" of the agency "could be preserved without carrying this inordinate overhead and these manifest abuses" he said, and the decision was made to shift them to other departments and agencies.

Such transfers were made "precisely as contemplated by the statute" on OEO, he said, and "the prospects for finding an increased burst of activity and more financial support for HEW are very, very good," especially for the Head Start program, which was transferred to HEW earlier.

Ehrlichman said most of the complaints are coming from "people who have found a home in the administration of community action agencies and are on the way out, and that's under-

standable. I can see how a person in the bureaucracy would express some unhappiness over the end of his governmental career. But their record is so bad in terms of performance that I have trouble giving them very much credence."

As for the argument that OEO gave the poor a voice in their own affairs and that voice is now being lost, Ehrlichman said existing Community Action Agencies were examined to determine whether the poor indeed had a voice and whether it had really helped them.

"There was no real evidence that this had worked," he said, to anyone's substantial betterment or benefit, though some individual programs were effective. The review indicated "that the concepts simply had not proved themselves."

The idea that local government really does not care about the poor, Ehrlichman said, needs investigation, and the Office of Management and Budget is determining the percentage of municipal budgets now devoted to the problems of the poor. "I think when we see that," he said, "we'll see just how turned-on or turned-off local government is."

On one specific White House decision in the current war over the future of the war on poverty—the fate of the legal services to the poor program—Ehrlichman said Mr. Nixon has already decided what form the quasi-governmental Legal Services Corporation he is proposing will take.

Legislation is being drafted and will be made public "shortly," he said, but

published reports anticipating the form so far have been "pretty haywire."

Those stories have indicated the President is considering a formula whereby legal services corporations could be created in the 50 states under a national corporation, with power of control in the hands of elected officials.

Hovering over the whole domestic program, finally, is the fight between the White House and Congress over the President's impoundment of funds voted by Congress for specific programs. Ehrlichman said he did not believe it will be critical in the President's drive to shift domestic responsibilities from Washington.

"I think the impoundment issue will have passed in large measure by the time special revenue-sharing is in the hearing process in the Congress," he said. "I think we'll go through a flurry of attention to so-called impoundment issues over a period of the next month or six weeks."

"There'll be some vetoes, there'll be some votes. Sooner or later people will accommodate themselves to the notion that this either is or isn't going to take place and will settle down to do the subsequent business."

Already, the President's chief domestic assistant said, "we're seeing an increasing acceptance, a tacit acceptance, on the part of the Congress of the President's basic concept of a spending limit. So that the debate now is centered not on whether there will be a spending limit but only how we will achieve it."

President