

Tom Braden

Innocent Victims of Watergate

Among the innocent bystanders who have been hurt by Watergate are two able aspirants to high office whose only fault is that they took jobs in the Nixon administration. Consider first the case of Donald Rumsfeld of Illinois.

Rumsfeld is a young and attractive former congressman who went on the White House staff with the idea that the job might give him the background and even perhaps the national attention necessary to become a senator. His aim was to take on Adlai Stevenson III in 1974.

Rumsfeld would still like to take on Stevenson. But four years of service to the Nixon administration have made such a challenge more difficult rather than less difficult.

He would have to run on his record—a former White House staff member, an official of the Cost of Living Council, an ambassador to NATO.

What would he say to questions about his close associations with Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Colson? Wouldn't he have to spend his campaign time waging a negative battle, denying over and over that he knew what his associates had been up to? What would he say about the cost of living? And whatever happened to Mr. Nixon's projected exercise in NATO solidarity, the Year of Europe?

Rumsfeld has a good friend in the President of the United States. The President persuaded him to leave the Congress and join the staff. In another year, with another President, the mere public knowledge of that fact might help a man to his Senate seat. But would Rumsfeld want his good friend to come out to Illinois to campaign for him?

Poor Rumsfeld. The Watergate never touched him. He didn't know about it until it happened. But it may have marked at least an interruption to a promising career.

Robert Finch of California is another Watergate victim. Haldeman and Ehrlichman didn't think he was strong enough to be Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. The record proves at least that he was not strong enough to overpower Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Time after time, Finch would voice a strong opinion—usually a moderate or liberal opinion—on such problems as school segregation and medical care. Time after time, Haldeman and Ehrlichman would prove to have stronger voices in the Oval Office and at the Justice Department, where John Mitchell presided. Finch would talk to Mitchell and then Finch would back down.

When he quit at HEW, he moved back into the White House where he was supposed to be a political consultant. But his old friend, Richard Nixon, hardly ever consulted him. He began to spend less and less time in his office; eventually, he moved back to Los Angeles to look over the political scene and to practice law.

Finch would like to run for governor of California and for senator. He has not yet declared that he won't do so. But what seemed to him to be major assets only a year ago have turned into



Donald Rumsfeld

handicaps. A close friend of President Nixon; a former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; a veteran of many Nixon campaigns and therefore closely associated with such other veterans as Herbert W. Kalmbach. These were major assets and now they are major liabilities.

In May of 1973, California's respected Field Poll matched Finch in a

race against the incumbent Democrat, Sen. Alan Cranston. The results were 49 per cent for Cranston, 36 per cent for Finch and 15 per cent undecided.

But by last month the Watergate hearings had done their work. When Finch took the poll again, Cranston had gained 8 points and Finch had lost 3.

Finch remains the best known

among prospective Republican challengers to Cranston and the best known among prospective Republican candidates to succeed Gov. Ronald Reagan. But the best known thing about him is his close association with Richard Nixon. Thus has Watergate done damage to good men.

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