

PRESIDENT ALOOF FROM '74 RACES

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Watergate and Lame Duck
Status of Nixon Swinging
Campaign Role to Bush

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 17 —
Four years ago, the White House threw all its resources into the off-year election campaign, hoping to win control of the Senate and create a favorable climate for the re-election of President Nixon.

Presidential political operatives such as Harry Dent, Charles W. Colson and Murray Chotiner worked in the background; Presidential speech writers such as William Safire and Patrick J. Buchanan cranked out drafts for Mr. Nixon's chief surrogate, Vice President Agnew; the President talked candidates into running and took to the road at the finish.

"It was a huge effort," recalls a key participant in it. "It fell just short of the kind of thing you do for a President."

No such centrally directed campaign, with a unified theme, has been planned by the White House for this year's elections, less than 11 months distant.

'No Disposition'

Interviews with top-level Presidential aides suggest, furthermore, that nothing approaching the 1970 effort is likely in 1974. One aide commented that he sensed "no disposition around here to go to any great lengths this year."

Many of the central figures of 1970 have left, and some have not been replaced. No successor has been named to Herbert G. Klein, the departed director of Communications for the executive branch; nor to Mr. Colson, who handled political fighting and won a reputation for ruthlessness; nor to Mr. Dent as the principal political liaison man on the Presidential staff.

For the first time in the memory of Washington observers, a campaign is beginning with no one in the White House clearly responsible for coordinating the efforts of the President's party. What centralized control there is is coming from the Republican National Committee and its chairman, George Bush of Texas.

A Lame Duck

To some degree, the situation results from Mr. Nixon's decision after the 1972 election to move politics out of the White House—a decision that reflected the reality that Mr. Nixon had become a lame duck

who would never again run for public office and was therefore less preoccupied than previously with campaigns.

But Watergate has also played its role. For the moment, identification with the White House is no great asset for a candidate for Congress or for the state houses.

Mrs. Anne Armstrong, an assistant to the President who has done more political liaison work in recent months than anyone else, concedes as much, although she clings to the contention that "the president can recover and he can recover in time for the elections."

Much depends, she said in an interview, on the timing and the nature of the House Judiciary Committee's report on impeachment. Not until that is known, Mrs. Armstrong commented, will Mr. Nixon be able to decide on his role and will candidates be able to decide how to treat "the Nixon issue."

Until then, she conceded, things will remain "rather diffuse and tentative."

But even if the worst should happen, Mrs. Armstrong said, and the President should be either on trial or out of office by November, Republican candidates should be able to hang on "by identifying with some of the Nixon programs, such as foreign policy in Asia and the Middle East, economy, and so on."

Nixon policies, she said "are more popular than Nixon the man."

Strong Temptation

If he is still in office come fall, a few of the President's old retainers expect him to be unable to resist the campaign trail, no matter what his difficulties are. He has campaigned every two years since 1946, when he was first elected to the House from California.

According to Mr. Bush, however, Mr. Nixon has told him that he would do nothing that would hurt any Republican candidate. Paraphrasing the President, Mr. Bush said that "if the candidate doesn't want him, the President won't go."

"We'll have to wait and see where he stands in the polls in the spring and summer," Mr. Bush said.

Like Mrs. Armstrong and others at the White House, Mr. Bush sees Vice President Ford as the prime Republican campaign asset. But few expect the former Michigan Congressman to act as a surrogate for Mr. Nixon as did Mr. Agnew in 1970, when his scheduling and speech writing were taken out of his hands.

"I would like to see Ford travel as widely as possible," Mr. Bush added, "speaking, raising funds, building."

But the party chairman has no intention of trying to set themes from Washington, as was done — particularly with law and order — in 1970. He thinks it was a mistake, and, in his own Senate campaign that year, told the White House

that he did not want "their damned television ads."

"Information yes," he said. "Research, candidate recruitment, but we're not going to try to orchestrate it."

Nor does Mr. Bush foresee any repetition of the 1970 effort to purge Republicans unfriendly to Mr. Nixon on certain issues. Unlike Mr. Colson, who masterminded the attacks on former Senator Charles E. Goodell of New York and others, Mr. Bush is a party man at bottom, not a Nixon loyalist.

"I think that people have come to realize that the party has been downgraded wrongly," he said. "If the 1970 and 1972 campaigns had been run by the party, we would be in far better shape today."

So far, Mr. Bush's close relationship with Mrs. Armstrong — they are old Texas friends — appears to have made the White House-national committee arrangement work. But new arrangements may have to be devised for the campaign year, particularly since Bryce N. Harlow, who has also been doing a good deal of political legwork, is planning to leave.

One unanswered question is fund-raising. In 1970, the White House dispensed campaign dollars to its favorites, giving it a measure of control. No decision on that aspect of 1974, informed sources said, has yet been reached.