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Burch Joins President's Staff Today

By Carroll Kilpatrick
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Dean Burch, the 46-year-old retiring chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, who is known as a man who knows how to get things done, joins the White House staff today at a time when his talents are in great demand.

With the departure Feb. 1 of former counselor Melvin R. Laird and the departure in the reasonably near future of Bryce Harlow, Burch has his work cut out for him. It will be to deal with the Republican Party, to work with Democratic and Republican members of Congress and to improve relations with business leaders disenchanted with the man they helped elect President less than 18 months ago.

The former Tucson, Ariz., lawyer and close associate of Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) made a reputation on the FCC as "a practical guy who was good at reconciling different factions," in the words of a Democratic lawyer who practices before the commission.

"He wasn't an extremist on the FCC," the attorney added. "He would rather compromise and get half a loaf than have an issue."

Burch's mentor, the Arizona senator who was defeated in the 1964 presidential campaign, recommended Burch to President Nixon in 1969, when the President nominated him as FCC chairman.

But reliable informants said that Goldwater was not instrumental in Burch's new appointment as White House counselor. That was the President's own idea, those who know Burch say, and it came as a complete surprise to Burch and to Goldwater.

In other words, these sources added, Burch is not being taken onto the White House staff as a peace offering to the right-wingers. He is a conservative, his friends say, but they insist that he is not a rigid ideologue.

Rather, he is in tune with the President's philosophy of favoring the principles of revenue sharing and free enterprise.

When Harlow leaves the White House to return to Procter & Gamble, Burch and Anne Armstrong, nother counselor, will be the only staff members with broad political experience.

Alexander M. Haig Jr, and press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, the men closest to the President, lack political expertise, a fact that GOP leaders on Capitol Hill have frequently complained about. Haig, a former Army officer, is the White House staff chief.

Burch has been described as a man who understands the two-party system and recognizes the virtues of compromise in politics and governance.

Since his new post gives him Cabinet rank, he will attend his first Cabinet meeting today and shortly thereafter be sworn in to his \$42,500-a-year post in the President's office.

The White House has been deliberately vague about his functions. In announcing the appointment Ziegler said last month that Burch "will be coming aboard as a general adviser and will be involved in special projects that the President will want him to take. But he is not replacing anyone."

Nevertheless, the assumption is that he is being groomed to replace Harlow.

"Burch is even more practical than Harlow, but he doesn't have Harlow's knowledge of individuals on Capitol Hill," a Burch admirer said. "Burch is a generalist who is a good politician."

Burch is a native of Enid, Okla., who was educated in Arizona and practiced law there. He served on Goldwater's Senate staff from 1955 to 1959 and then returned to Tucson to practice law.

After taking an active part in Goldwater's 1964 campaign for the presidential nomination, Burch became chairman of the Republican National Committee for the fall campaign.

But following the Goldwater debacle in November, GOP leaders, who were determined to erase the Goldwater image from the party, ousted Burch and replaced him with Ohio's Ray C. Bliss. In 1969, President Nixon ousted Bliss and made Burch the FCC chairman.