

Women's Programs Hurt by Watergate

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President Nixon's White House program to promote women has virtually been wiped out by Watergate.

The staff of the Office of Women's Programs has been whittled down to one secretary. "Things are not moving around here," one insider said of the administration efforts on behalf of women.

And another source said the women's office "as an advocate is temporarily abrogated."

All the key women recruited in the White House by presidential counselor Anne Armstrong have left or given notice of their departure, and no successors have been indicated.

With them has gone hopes for holding the nation's first White House conference on women and a lot of plans for recruiting women in high government policy-making posts.

"There's not a woman appointee in the pipeline now," a source said, adding it may take months to regroup a new staff.

It was no secret that there was general discouragement among those involved in women's programs. One source pointed out that "special interest advocates" for women and blacks "are really so far out of everybody's mind there (in the White House) these days."

And it was reported that there is a reluctance to bring up such matters when the President and his key advisers are engaged in the Watergate battles.

White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. has the final say on such matters as the appointment of top women in the administration but was said to be "totally preoccupied" with other matters.

Mrs. Armstrong, with a long list of White House project responsibilities from the Cost of

Living Council to the bicentennial, has become increasingly involved with speechmaking in defense of the President in the Watergate affair.

One source who knows Mrs. Armstrong well said she "cares a lot about the women's issue" but is spread too thin with added public relations assignments in the Watergate defense.

Mrs. Armstrong said, however, that her efforts are not stymied and she will be "going ahead as strong as ever" on behalf of women. "We'll make do—it won't fall through the crack," she said about the staff departures.

In the past six months there have been only two new high-level women appointees—Assistant Secretary for Education Virginia Y. Totter of Lincoln, Neb., and Assistant Attorney General Carla Anderson Hills of Los Angeles. There does not seem to be a similar appointment in sight now and "a dead period is predictable," a source said.

The four key women recruited by Mrs. Armstrong who have left or are leaving are:

- Vera Herschberg she is stepping down as director of the Office of Women's Progress. A former newspaperwoman, she is moving over to a public relations post in the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- Nola Smith, presidential staff assistant in charge of recruiting women for high government posts. She announced over the weekend that she will be leaving by the end of July. Former campaign manager for Republican Sen. John Tower of Texas, she is leaving to marry lawyer Paul Haerle, vice chairman of the Republican Party in California.

- Jill Ruckelshaus, who resigned in March as special assistant to Mrs. Armstrong in charge of women's programs. A nationally known advocate of equal rights, she left the White House five months after her husband, William Ruckelshaus, resigned as deputy attorney general in the dispute over the firing of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

- Dr. Jean Spencer, a political scientist who headed Vice

President Spiro T. Agnew's research office and worked with the women's office since December. She has left to take on a college post in Annapolis.

"It's a shame that the fine work that Jill Ruckelshaus began and Vera Herschberg carried on is going to end because the White House has been slow in selecting successors," said June McMichaels, director of the National Women's Political Caucus.

"Under their leadership, the Office of Women's Affairs was very important and did really perform a leadership role in the fight for ERA [the Equal Rights Amendment] and a number of other key women's issues," she said.

With Mrs. Smith, the talent searcher, leaving, "I guess we're going to see a real dry period in the employment of women in government," Ms. McMichaels said.



ANNE ARMSTRONG

... key recruits have left

However, Mrs. Armstrong was optimistic that she could put it all back together again.

She said she had two "strong possibilities" as candidates for the Ruckelshaus post, which she said in March she would fill in about two weeks. It has now been two months with the vacancy unfilled.

Mrs. Armstrong, referring to Mrs. Smith's departure as "another surprise," said she hoped she could fill that spot by the time Mrs. Smith leaves.