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# Intimates Knew LBJ Was Out

(Editor's Note: Today's column is written by Jack Anderson, Drew Pearson's associate.)

WASHINGTON — President Johnson's dramatic decision not to seek reelection didn't come as a complete surprise to his intimates, though the timing caught their breath.

For several months he has been telling them that he didn't intend to run again, but that he would do everything in his power to win the Democratic nomination for Vice-President Humphrey. He made it clear that he expected to control the convention.

On at least one occasion the President told the vice-president that he had even considered resigning so Humphrey could run as the incumbent. On second thought, however, LBJ said he had dismissed this notion as morally and politically indefensible.

None of his intimates really believed he would give up his grip on the White House. Yet neither did they feel that he was trying to mislead them. It was merely his mood of the moment, they felt, to shed the great burden.

Humphrey was one who believed the President's talk of retiring would change with his mood. When LBJ brought up the subject, the vice-president always responded by urging him to run.

Last summer, however, Secretary of State Rusk became convinced that the President was serious about retiring. Rusk took Humphrey aside and urged him to prepare emotionally to step up into the presidential race. The secretary of state urged Humphrey to get around the country more and build up his political fences.

Rusk also immediately began giving the vice-president full briefings on security developments. The President also pulled Humphrey more and more into the policy councils. Insiders say that Humphrey may now even be better informed than the President who doesn't have as much time as Humphrey to study the top-secret dispatches.

ON THE SUNDAY of the President's announcement, he called upon the vice-president in the morning and later telephoned him from the White House. He made it plain to Humphrey that his decision to retire was irrevocable.

But the decision was news to most other intimates. Even James Rowe, chairman of the Johnson for President Citizens Committee, worked all day Sunday on the Johnson campaign. He received a phone call from the President scarcely an hour before the withdrawal was announced. The previous Friday the President spoke to intimates about the campaign, including his aide in charge of politics, Marvin Watson. The President talked about delegates, discussed political strategy, and gave every indication that he was running. At midnight, he telephoned Gov. Robert Docking of Kansas, and again discussed political strategy.

Those who know the President are convinced that he meant what he said in his Sunday night announcement about wishing to unite the country and lift the Presidency above partisan strife.

The President usually holds off great decisions till the last minute, a characteristic that has raised public doubts about his forthrightness. But this indecision, according to those who know him best, is a manifestation of his innate caution.

He has revealed this side of his character in stories he tells his friends. He likes to relate, for instance, how he once organized a gang of teenagers to waylay an unpopular but rugged teacher on a lonely country road. When the hated teacher came into view, there was a cry of "Let's go!"

Young Lyndon rushed for the teacher, but it was Lyndon who was slammed to the ground. The teacher immediately jumped on him and began pummeling him with a belt. Johnson looked around for help and found his companions had fled.

THE PRESIDENT puts great faith in the lessons of his youth. Today he never goes charging into a situation until he has explored every contingency and is sure his backers are with him. He is far more cautious, insiders insist, then he is devious. What passes for political manipulation often is no more than extraordinary caution.

These insiders point out that LBJ has kept quiet and accepted abuse when he could have made himself a national hero by explaining his motives to the country. However, he has felt these explanations might have jeopardized his goals.

He was the subject of considerable criticism, for example, when he held up food shipments to famine-stricken India last year. He was accused of playing politics with the hungry. The delay was merely a tactic, to bring pressure on India to enact reforms that he believed were for its own good.

By holding back American aid, he also forced other governments to send aid to India, and reduced the costs to the American taxpayers. In his own view, at least, he allowed himself to become a martyr for the ultimate benefit of both India and the United States.

He has had the same motive, intimates insist, in hiding the true picture of the Vietnam war behind a smoke-screen of words. While the President felt that escalation of the war was necessary to our national interests, he wanted to avoid provoking Russia and China. Now he is persuaded, because of the deep division the war has caused at home, that he must do all in his power to seek an honorable peace.