

THE ECONOMIST

22-28 November 1975

AppointmentsWho's ambitious?*Washington, DC*

Mr Gerald Ford's recent rearrangement of his cabinet and national security apparatus seemed to have little to do with policy and a great deal to do with the presidential politics of 1976. By assigning new jobs to Mr Donald Rumsfeld, Mr George Bush and Mr Elliot Richardson, Mr Ford may have been trying to set up all of them as potential vice-presidential candidates—thus giving various elements within the Republican party hope that their man might win the second spot on the ballot at the convention in Kansas City next summer. When Democrats in the Senate, many

of whom are themselves actual or potential presidential candidates, perceived such a buildup to be under way, they began to mutter darkly that as a condition of confirmation to office, the nominees should renounce any vice-presidential ambitions and promise to remain in the cabinet through 1976.

But when Mr Rumsfeld came before the Senate armed services committee for a hearing on his qualifications to be secretary of defence, it became immediately clear that no such condition would be imposed upon him. The former White House chief of staff, in fact, had an easy time of it. Severe reservations were expressed on the subject of detente with Russia—particularly by Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the spiritual leader of conservative Republicans, and by Senator Henry Jackson of Washington, who has opposed trade and other agreements with the Russians without explicit concessions in return. But Mr Rumsfeld managed to avoid committing himself one way or another on any controversial topic. He portrayed himself as a proponent of a strong national defence, but also as an apostle of international goodwill—above all as President Ford's man, eager to help work out a cautious compromise with Moscow in the strategic arms limitation talks. When the subject of the Republican vice-presidential nomination did come up, courtesy of Mr Jackson, Mr Rumsfeld said it would be "presumptuous of me to reject something that has not been offered".

The hearings were notable largely for eulogies to Mr Rumsfeld's departed pre-

decessor, Mr James Schlesinger, who was praised for serving as a counterpoint to the presumed father of detente, Mr Henry Kissinger, the strong-willed secretary of state. Most senators simply came around to the view that the president is entitled to have whomsoever he pleases at the Pentagon, and when they convened on Tuesday to consider Mr Rumsfeld's nomination, they approved him by a vote of 95 to 2, after only half an hour of debate.

For Mr Bush, nominated by the president to become director of Central Intelligence, the portents are not so favourable. Mr Frank Church of Idaho, who is leading the Senate investigation of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, has complained that it would be a grave disservice to put a pure-and-simple politician into such a sensitive job just when the CIA faces a crisis of confidence. Mr Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the assistant Democratic leader in the Senate, has demanded that Mr Bush, as a minimum, make himself unavailable for the vice-presidency. By the time Mr Bush returns from Peking, where he is now the chief American representative, he can probably expect a hostile reception and a thorough interrogation from the Senate.

A rejection of Mr Bush may be made easier by the fact that three other nominees presented by Mr Ford have been rejected by Senate committees in recent months. The Senate commerce committee voted against both Mr Joseph Coors, a wealthy brewer from Colorado who had been nominated as a director of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Mrs Isabel Burgess, who had been nominated for a second term as a member of the National Transportation Safety Board. (The committee found actual or potential conflicts-of-interest in both their backgrounds.) And the Senate banking committee refused to endorse Mr Ben Blackburn, a former Republican congressman from Georgia, as chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board. As a congressman, Mr Blackburn voted against the fair housing act, which he would have been required to administer had he been confirmed.