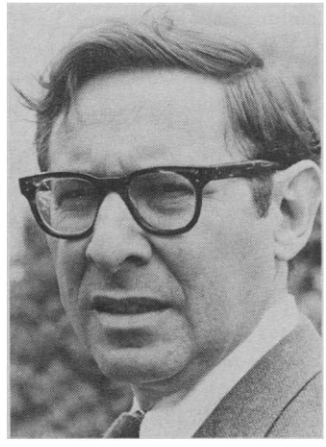
# Robert A. Goldwin: Bridge Between Thinkers and Doers

The White House's lightning rod for outside ideas has traditionally been an eminent academic. His presence, usually much ballyhooed, helps foster the impression that the denizens of the White House are not wholly antipathetic to those of ivory towers. Arthur Schlesinger performed this useful service for President Kennedy, Daniel Moynihan for President Nixon.

President Ford's choice for White House thinker-in-residence is a man quite different from his predecessors in both style and substance. Robert A. Goldwin describes himself as "not a star, but more like a manager or agent." Whereas his luminous predecessors hailed from Harvard, Goldwin is a former dean of St. John's College, Annapolis, an institution best known for the idiosyncratic nature of its curriculum. Strangest contrast of all, Goldwin bridles at the label of intellectual and in fact chides those who so style themselves for their folly, arrogance, and apartness from the common run of humankind.



Goldwin's appointment as special consultant to the President, announced on 9 December, was overshadowed by an event held the same evening, a dinner-time seminar he had organized for the President, at the hands of historian Daniel Boorstin, James Q. Wilson, professor of government at Harvard, and Martin Diamond of Northern Illinois University. The meeting was apparently a free-ranging discussion of such topics as the purpose of prisons, the mood of the nation as it approaches the bicentennial, and presidential leadership in an age of pessimism.

Goldwin has been setting up get-togethers between academics and politicians ever since 1960, when he became director of the public affairs conference center at the University of Chicago. The first meeting he organized there was attended by then-Representative Gerald Ford, Senator Edmund Muskie, and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, then the attorney for the NAACP.

While at Chicago Goldwin came to know Illinois Congressman Donald Rumsfeld. When Rumsfeld became ambassador to NATO he was allowed to take a personal assistant and chose Goldwin. Rumsfeld brought Goldwin into the White House when he himself was appointed Ford's chief of staff.

Goldwin conceives his job as being to seek out individuals with interesting ideas and bring them to the attention of the President and his staff. This will be done sometimes by seminars, but more often in written form. He is looking for people, in and out of university, who are both sound analytical scholars, and can make their ideas intelligible. He declines to say what specific issues he is exploring but notes that while he makes proposals, the President decides on who should be invited and what is to be discussed. The general aim is to hasten the process by which ideas reach the White House. The people Goldwin is after "are not the kind who think of calling up the White House when they have an idea; their natural tendency is to sit down and write an article."

"We don't ask academic people for a 10-point program," Goldwin says. "What they are best at is saying what the problem is." Goldwin has no well-defined method for seeking out the individuals he wishes to cultivate, but he already knows many people in the academic and practical worlds. He regards himself as a bridge-builder between the two. "I think I know how to make their encounters more fruitful. Lots of times people may go away shaking their heads if these things are not properly arranged, the politicians saying 'These damned professors think they know it all' and the academics thinking how hard it is to communicate with these thick-headed pols. Both are wrong."

Although he is an official conduit for the flow of outside ideas to the White House, Goldwin has a notably detached attitude toward the intellectual community. He stresses that he is interested only in individuals, not in the academic community per se. He does not describe himself or those he deals with as intellectuals, because of reservations about what the term has come to connote. "There is something fishy about the word 'intellectual,'" Goldwin says. "I think of 'intellectuals' as people who have a real distaste, sometimes even contempt, for the common sense approach, which is fundamentally the political approach. So 'intellectuals' don't have much that is helpful to say to people who have to run the government. They don't even have much to say to the ordinary citizen, except that 'You have no standards of taste, you don't understand things as they really are, and the only way to have a better society is to reorder it according to our principles rather than yours.'"

Goldwin sees the academic community and society as natural adversaries, with the government standing as the ultimate guarantor of the intellectuals' freedom and safety. "People who study are not very popular most of the time. Government protects their freedom, because any enlightened leader knows that progress depends on the quality of study that goes on. There is both interdependence and independence between people who study and people who make decisions."

Goldwin is a political scientist by background, and author of a book on Locke. He is a graduate of St. John's College, Annapolis, and from 1969 to 1973 was its dean. The college's unique curriculum is based on the study of some 130 "great books" of western civilization, students dividing their time between science and the humanities. "We bridge the two worlds of C. P. Snow, says college president Richard D. Weigle. Goldwin's forte, however, is in political science, and he has no immediate plans for convening a presidential seminar on matters scientific.—N.W.