FROM THE OLD HANDS HERE, REAGAN'S CABINET-MAKING GETS SOMEWHAT MIXED REVIEWS. ON BALANCE, THE CONSENSUS SEEMS TO BE THAT HE DID PRETTY WELL, BUT THAT THE PEOPLE HE HAS CHOSEN, FOR ALL THEIR EXPERIENCED BACKGROUNDS, SCARCELY ADD UP TO A STUNNING NEW GROUP OF OPERATORS COMING TO TOWN.

"THE RESULTS ARE PRETTY GOOD," SAID SENATOR BOB DOLE OF KANSAS, WHO ONCE THOUGHT HE'D HAVE HIS OWN CABINET. "CABINETS CHANGE PRETTY QUICKLY. I THOUGHT CARTER PUT TOGETHER A PRETTY GOOD CABINET, BUT HE DIDN'T THINK SO. HE FIRED A LOT OF THEM."

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IS THAT THE WASHINGTONIANS ONLY KNOW A FEW OF THE REAGAN CABINET -- AND THEY ARE AWAITING THE COMING OF THE OUTSIDERS, WHOM THEY HAVE YET TO MEET.

SENATOR DOLE, FOR ONE, WAS PLEASED THAT PRESIDENT-ELECT REAGAN HAD AT LEAST MADE AN EFFORT AT THE "RECOGNITION" OF VARIOUS GROUPS LIKE WOMEN, BLACKS AND CHICANOS IN HIS CABINET-MAKING. THAT, TO DOLE, WAS A GOOD SIGN, BUT AS TO JUST HOW EFFECTIVE THIS NEW CABINET WILL PROVE, THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. "THE RHETORIC IS EASY," DOLE SAID. "IT'S MAKING THE RECORD THAT'S HARD."

NIXON CABINET-MAN MELVIN LAIRD WAS PLEASED THAT REAGAN HAD GONE BASICALLY TO NEW PEOPLE. HE CONFIDED THAT HE STRONGLY ADVISED REAGAN TO PICK NEW PEOPLE -- NOT TO TAKE MORE THAN TWO FROM THE NIXON-FORD ADMINISTRATIONS. TO TAKE MORE, LAIRD SUGGESTED TO REAGAN, WOULD TIE THE GOVERNOR TOO CLOSELY TO THE PAST REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATIONS. "IT WOULD BE A BAD MISTAKE IF THIS IS NOT A REAGAN CABINET," LAIRD SAID. "THIS IS A REAGAN CABINET." LAIRD WAS ESPECIALLY PLEASED WITH CAP WEINBERGER AT DEFENSE ("A GOOD MAN"), AL HAIG AT STATE ("A GOOD STRONG GUY"), AND THE NEW U.N. AMBASSADOR ("SHE'S TERRIFIC."
FORMER SENATOR BILL FULBRIGHT, WHO'S BEEN DEALING WITH CABINETS SINCE WORLD WAR II, SAID HE WAS "NOT KEEN ON TURNING STATE OVER TO A GENERAL," BUT FROM WHAT HE COULD TELL OF REAGAN'S CABINET CHOICES THEY SEEMED TO HAVE "IMPRESSIVE" CREDENTIALS. HE SEES REAGAN USING THE CABINET THE WAY EISENHOWER DID -- GIVING THEM LARGE RESPONSIBILITIES. "WITH HIS TEMPERAMENT," FULBRIGHT SAID, "HE MIGHT MEAN IT. HE'S NOT A SEVEN A.M. TO MIDNIGHT WORKER LIKE LYNDON JOHNSON."

"IT LOOKS LIKE A BUSINESSMAN'S CABINET," SAID ONE VETERAN LOBBYIST WHO'S BEEN IN AND OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT." IT LOOKS LIKE IT REFLECTS REAGAN'S COMPLEX SOUL. HE'S GOT ALL THE CONTRADICTIONS IN REAGAN WRAPPED UP IN THAT CABINET. HE DOESN'T WANT TO RULE LIKE GOLDWATER WITH A BASEBALL BAT. IT'S AN EXTENSION OF HIS CAMPAIGN CONSERVATISM. IT SHOWS GUTS, A LEVEL OF COMPASSION. HE DIDN'T WANT TO GO OVERBOARD AND ALIENATE THE BLACKS AND THE CHICANOS. HE KNEW WHAT HE WANTED."

AT THE SAME TIME THIS LONGTIME LOBBYIST GAVE REAGAN MIXED GRADES IN SOME OF HIS LESS OBVIOUS CABINET CHOICES: HE WAS DISAPPOINTED FOR EXAMPLE THAT REAGAN LEFT HUD AS THE SYMBOLIC BLACK SEAT IN THE CABINET. "THE BLACK HE'S PICKED MIGHT AS WELL BE FROM THE MOON. REAGAN DIDN'T HAVE THE ORIGINAL IDEA THAT HUD BE A REAL AGENCY. WHY NOT GIVE YOURSELF A HELLUVA ADMINISTRATOR AND HAVE AT IT. TURN IT OVER TO SOMEONE WHO'D DO SOME ASS-BUSTING, GO AFTER INDUSTRY WITH A HEAVY PITCH AND GET THINGS GOING."

BUT AT LABOR, THINGS LOOK BETTER. "HE DIDN'T DO THE PROSAIC THING AND PUT MARTIN DURKIN IN AS SECRETARY OF PLUMBING. HE WASN'T AFRAID TO BREAK EGGS. I HEAR THE GUY HE PICKED IS READY TO TEAR THE DEPARTMENT APART TO MAKE IT WORK BETTER. IT SOUNDS ENCOURAGING. HE'S WILLING TO TAKE A WHACK AT IT."