

Rice seen as mayor's choice for top cop

By David Axelrod

Political writer

MAYOR HAROLD Washington will name a new Chicago police superintendent and dismiss the city's current fire commissioner Tuesday, City Hall sources said Monday.

The mayor will likely name Fred Rice, chief of patrol, as the first black to serve as police chief on a permanent basis, they said.

Washington also is expected to announce the firing of Fire Commissioner William Blair and his choice as a successor, who reportedly will come from within the department, according to the sources.

Rice, 56, who formerly was deputy chief of patrol and commander of the Englewood Police District, was one of three finalists who met with the mayor on Monday.

A 28-year-veteran of the police department, Rice is one of the higher ranking blacks in the police department. He said late Monday that Washington had not indicated to him who the police superintendent would be. However, the mayor told Rice he planned to announce his choice on Tuesday or Wednesday.

MEANWHILE MONDAY, a spokesman for the mayor said that about 200 to 300 police officers will be laid off next month, about half the number that had been originally targeted as part of Washington's fiscal recovery plan.

Grayson Mitchell, the mayor's press secretary, said budget analysts have scaled down their initial estimate that 537 police officers would lose their jobs to help close a potential 1983 budget deficit.

Washington interviewed two other police chief finalists Monday: Rudy Nimocks, commander of the Harrison Detective Area, and Deputy Police Supt. Matt Rodriguez, who is in charge of the police department's bureau of technical services.

RICE, A KOREAN War veteran, has been in charge of about 8,000 police officers as head of the patrol division, a position he has held since 1979.

As commander of the Englewood District, Rice was in the hot seat in 1974 when he created more black and white police teams by breaking up many longstanding two-man squad car teams.

His men protested what they called "forced integration" by staging a slowdown in ticket writing.

Rice previously served as commander of the old Fillmore District on the West Side when it was one of the toughest districts in the city.

THE BUDGET revision on police layoffs came as the mayor's office completed work on a plan to be released Wednesday specifying 1,700 layoffs in the police department and other city agencies.



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Mitchell also said that Acting Police Supt. James O'Grady and the police hierarchy were arguing strongly for the closing of the Morgan Park, Town Hall and several other police stations as an efficiency move.

"Ultimately it will be the mayor's decision, of course, but the police department feels we can save millions and deploy manpower more efficiently if these stations are closed," Mitchell told reporters in City Hall. "They say new area headquarters near those stations were built to absorb the action, and the stations are no longer needed."

WHILE THE MAYOR huddled with aides on the budget plan, his city council foes postponed action on a lawsuit they had threatened challenging Washington's right to make the cuts.

Ald. Edward M. Burke [14th], chairman of the Chicago City Council's Finance Committee, said his attorneys are struggling with the language of such a lawsuit, searching for winning legal points.

"We're trying to put together a complaint," said Burke, who supported an alternative, temporary furlough plan that was approved last week by the council but vetoed by Washington. "We're looking at a couple of points, but admittedly, it is an uphill fight."

Burke has contended that in laying off 1,700 city workers, Washington "is playing a dangerous form of Russian roulette" with the safety of Chicago residents.

The city faces a deficit in next year's budget of an estimated \$80 million, although the layoffs could reduce that to about \$50 million, according to the mayor's office.