

Pathologists Defend Noguchi's Handling of Kennedy Autopsy

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Pathologists familiar with Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi's handling of the autopsy in the Sen. Robert F. Kennedy assassination came to his defense Saturday when they learned the county coroner may face ouster proceedings Tuesday.

Dr. William G. Eckert, former chairman of the pathology section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, said in Wichita that he and Dr. Cyril Wecht of Pittsburgh, present chairman, were shocked to learn the Board of Supervisors may be asked to initiate dismissal action.

Noguchi said Friday that L. S. Hollinger, county chief administrative officer, had demanded his resignation from the \$31,104-a-year post as the county's chief medical examiner-coroner.

Hollinger has received complaints about Noguchi's asserted delay in handling the Kennedy autopsy and on other phases of his work, officials said.

County supervisors are expected to hear Hollinger's report in executive session Tuesday.

If they then favor dismissal of Noguchi, the Civil Service Commission may be requested to call a public hearing on the question.

Eckert, deputy coroner and forensic pathologist at Francis Hospital in Wichita, said: "It grinds us the wrong way to have Noguchi subjected to criticism."

Eckert assisted in the Kennedy autopsy last year after being deputized by Dr. Noguchi as a consultant.

In a telephone interview, Eckert said:

"It was probably the best, most thorough and most minutely handled forensic case I've ever seen.

"I've talked to Dr. Wecht and he also feels very strongly about this character assassination of Dr. Noguchi.

"Dr. Wecht reviewed the entire report in the Ken-

nedy case as a coroner's pathologist. He is chairman and director of the Pittsburgh Legal Medicine Institute.

"Dr. Wecht is in New York today. He told me by telephone that he is writing to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to protest any action against

Dr. Noguchi. We both consider him a brilliant man."

Eckert offered to come to Los Angeles to testify if the Civil Service Commission considers any action against the coroner.

Suggesting there may be some malcontents in the coroner's department, the Wichita pathologist said, "Maybe he should have cleaned house when he went in."

Then, referring to the opposition of the USC and UCLA medical schools to Noguchi's appointment as coroner in 1967, Eckert said, "The problem probably revolves around the medical schools' wanting political control of the coroner's office."

At the time of the appointment, medical school spokesmen had complained that Noguchi, then 40, was too young and inexperienced for the post. Because the coroner traditionally served on the medical faculties of the two schools, the schools claimed they had a special interest in his appointment.

Noguchi had previously served as assistant professor and associate clinical professor of pathology at USC.