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Sprague Fired, Move Opposed By Slay Panel

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chairman Henry B. Gonzalez of the House assassinations committee fired the panel's chief counsel yesterday, but the counsel, Richard A. Sprague, said Gonzalez' order had been countermanded by other committee members.

Gonzalez told Sprague to get out of the committee's office by 5 p.m. EST, but Sprague refused to leave.

Earlier in the day, Gonzalez had called Sprague a "prima donna" and said the committee had to make a choice between preserving itself or keeping Sprague on the payroll.

Later, Gonzalez sent a letter to Sprague, saying: "Your employment is terminated as of this date.

"Your personal possessions are to be removed by 5 o'clock today," Gonzalez' letter said. "You are to deliver your keys to the office superintendent and clear the building by 5 o'clock today."

But Sprague responded with a statement that he had been "directed by the committee to disregard the order by Chairman Gonzalez on the basis of a determination that he does not have the power to unilaterally discharge Mr. Sprague."

The committee staff spokesman distributing the statement said he did not know how many committee members had countermanded Gonzalez' order.

A Republican committee member, Rep. Stewart McKinney of Connecticut, said as far as he is concerned, Sprague can be fired only by all House Democrats in caucus and by the full assassinations committee.