

# Sprague: Won't Quit

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Richard Sprague, former special prosecutor in the Joseph Yablonski murder case, said yesterday he has no intention of quitting his new controversial role as director of a U.S. House investigation of two political assassinations of the 1960s.

Some congressmen are seeking Sprague's ouster as chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which is investigating the murders of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"I've given no thought to resigning," Sprague told the Post-Gazette amid Washington reports that his firing is the price for continuation of the assassination probes.

He said he will continue to fight for an independent, no-leads-barred investigation of the Kennedy and King shootings. In the case of Kennedy, he said his own investigation would be the first full-scale official investigation since the 1964 Warren Commission concluded

that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin.

Sprague also defended the proposed \$13-million, two-year budget for his investigations. He said that compares favorably with other important investigations. But some congressmen balked this week over the dollar amount.

Sprague, former No. 2 man in the Philadelphia district attorney's office, gained national fame with his successful four-year prosecution of nine persons for the 1969 assassinations of Yablonski, his wife and their daughter in their Washington County farmhouse.

That case ended with the 1974 murder conviction of former United Mine Workers President Tony Boyle, Yablonski's union rival.

Last fall, Sprague accepted the new assassination committee job and immediately demanded an independent investigation without the help of such agencies as the FBI and Central Intelligence Agency.

But the select committee's status became clouded this week when questions

were raised in the new Congress about the money request, about Sprague's proposed investigative methods and about his background.

Sprague said in a telephone interview yesterday that when he took the \$39,600-a-year job he imposed conditions, such as that he would have the right to hire and fire staff members and that the twin investigations would be "open-ended."

Since the murder of Kennedy in 1963 and King in 1968, questions have been raised about whether the alleged assassins acted alone.

Also under question have been the possible roles of the CIA and FBI in both cases. Questions, too, have been raised about possible tie-ins between the Kennedy assassination and attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro, Cuban premier.

Sprague indicated he wants to explore and resolve these matters and more, and that he needs his proposed 170-member staff to do so.

"But every step in the investigations

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will be pursued in consultation with the (assassination) committee," Sprague said.

He maintained there has been a "total distortion" this week of his proposed methods, such as using body electronic transmitters, telephone recording devices, polygraphs (lie detectors) and voice stress evaluators.

"No interviews or tests or anything else will be done without the knowledge and consent of those interviewed," Sprague said, adding that wiretapping has not been considered.

Of the use of hidden transmitters, Sprague said:

"Part of the people involved may have been in the underworld, and in the case of Castro, we're dealing with proand anti-Castro forces. People are getting knocked off every day.

"Our people (the investigators) don't have weapons, and there may be occasions when our man would be in a position to say, 'Help.' That's why we need transmitters."

Sprague said criticisms of himself

and his methods, have been "misstated by people for their own purposes." He declined to elaborate.

Sprague said the \$13 million for the investigation—making them the most expensive ever conducted by Congress—is not excessive because the committee is starting from scratch without the use of existing government agencies.

He said the Warren Commission had an 83-member staff plus 260 FBI agents and support persons and more than 60 full-time workers from other government agencies. New York State, he said, is spending \$6 million and using 421 people in a probe of nursing homes.

"We're talking about two homicides in which some witnesses are overseas. We need an independent investigative staff."

House Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Tex., said this week the House leadership would try to re-establish the assassination committee in an orderly way instead of "trying to cram it down their (House members') throats."



RICHARD SPRAGUE

Until the House acts, probably in February, the assassination committee staff will continue to operate on an \$84,000-a-month budget with a 73-member staff.