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Truman Fired His A.G. For Firing a Prosecutor

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President Harry S. Truman fired his Attorney General 22 years ago for discharging a special federal prosecutor appointed to look into allegations of corruption in government.

Truman gave J. Howard McGrath his walking papers April 3, 1952, after the Attorney General had fired Newbold Morris, a New York Republican figure whom the President had appointed to investigate the Justice Department and other federal agencies which had been beset by scandals.

The firing of McGrath followed an angry, semipublic clash between him and the President over the Attorney General's discharge of Morris, after McGrath had refused the prosecutor's demand for financial disclosure reports from department officials.

The argument between

McGrath and Truman occurred as they and other Cabinet members were awaiting the arrival of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands at the Washington airport. McGrath had fired Morris without telling Truman of his intentions, and the President informed the Attorney General of his "resignation" in a telephone call without the usual formality of a written communication.

Truman appointed federal Judge James P. McGranery to replace McGrath, who called his discharge a "penalty for standing up for the great principles of personal liberty and the fundamental rights of employees of the federal government."

Morris said McGrath apparently had expected him to conduct a "whitewash" and "everything was cozy, comfortable and cordial until Howard McGrath discovered I meant business."