

Saxbe Hits Leniency On Watergate Crimes

6/27/74
By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho, June 24—Attorney General William B. Saxbe said today that convicted Watergate conspirators who go to prison should not be released in "the wink of an eye."

"It is hardly reassuring when one man goes to prison for years for theft while another man involved in a conspiracy to steal our freedoms is in and out of jail in the wink of an eye," Saxbe told the National Association of Attorneys General at an annual conference in this resort city.

"The message has got to go out all over the country—there will be no more dirty tricks, not by anybody for any reason," Saxbe said.

Later, in an interview, Saxbe said he was not alluding to any Watergate defendant in particular, and he sidestepped questions about his

views on the lengths of sentences already imposed on several Nixon administration officials.

The longest sentence so far was given to former White House aide Charles W. Colson, who on Friday received one to three years on his guilty plea to disseminating defamatory information about Pentagon Papers defendant Daniel Ellsberg.

"They should be prosecuted just as any other violators. I do not want to get into individual cases because that means individual conditions involving individual judges," Saxbe said.

In his speech, Saxbe said, "As we have seen in Watergate, men who held positions of great power have defaulted on their oaths of office and to

See SAXBE, A6, Col. 1

SAXBE, From A1

the responsibility they owe to the public.

"Criminal violations cannot be tolerated on the part of anyone—no matter what position of public trust they may have held, no matter how glib their attempts at justification may be," Saxbe said.

A devotion to decency and fairness, the Attorney General said, "keeps us from straying into tyranny."

"Fairness is most needed when it is in short supply or when a problem assumes such great proportions that we are tempted to resolve it through expediency outside the law," he said.

Saxbe's speech here was part of a busy itinerary of public speaking engagements the Attorney General has undertaken in recent weeks to counteract what he has described as a dwindling sense of confidence on the part of the American public in law enforcement institutions as a result of the Watergate scandal. Saxbe called his busy speaking schedule, which includes two more addresses in the Midwest this week, a "salvage operation for the Justice Department."

In an interview here, Saxbe said the problem of sentencing high government officials involved in the Watergate scandals has created a "crunch" for jurists and other law enforcement policy makers.

"People say prisons are outmoded, that no one should go to jail anymore . . . but at the same time, with Agnew, they say, 'throw the book at Agnew . . .,'" Saxbe said.

He characterized the dilemma as "walking the razor's edge," adding that his personal opinion on sentencing convicted government officials has been guided by the belief that, "I don't want the people of this country to think that there are two classes of justice, one for the rich and one for the poor."

Saxbe also renewed his criticism of plea bargaining as a prosecuting device.

"We can violate the fairness doctrine when we plea bargain without substantial basis (or)

when we use immunity in an unfair manner and use various practices that are substitutes for the rubber hose," Saxbe said.

He said he is particularly offended when immunity is granted for the sole purpose of extracting testimony against other defendants, and when a defendant is prosecuted for contempt for renegeing on a trade of testimony for immunity.

Saxbe characterized this practice, whether used to excess in the investigation of a national scandal or by local law enforcement officials in routine criminal cases, as a "dirty trick."

Saxbe disclosed that he had directed Justice Department officials to begin a study of the practice of granting immunity to determine whether it is being abused. The federal-level study, begun two weeks ago, is being conducted by a committee led by Deputy Attorney General Laurence H. Silberman, Saxbe said.

Saxbe also disclosed in his speech that Justice will begin a nationwide drive to reduce the theft and counterfeiting of stocks and bonds, which now cause losses of up to \$50 billion annually.

He said a "blueprint" of a campaign against theft of securities will be circulated to financial institutions and local law enforcement agencies. It includes the use of central certificate depositories and an improved system of quickly checking the authenticity of stocks and bonds through the National Crime Information Center, which is operated by the FBI.

The program, Saxbe said, not only will help combat organized crime, but can help block the drain of the economy that these stolen securities so often represent, especially when spirited out of the country.

The nation's state attorneys general, who today began a three-day conference, are expected to consider resolutions dealing with the effects of the Watergate affair on law enforcement agencies and the legal profession.