

New Man at the F.B.I.

Ruckelshaus, as Environmental Chief, Held to Be Firm, Fair and Independent

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WASHINGTON, April 27 — A couple of weeks ago when William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, reversed himself and gave the auto industry an additional year to meet the 1975 Federal anti-pollution standards, a reporter asked him whether he had yielded to White House pressure. With a slight trace of heat, Mr. Ruckelshaus replied: "I told the White House it was my decision; the law made it my decision and that they should stay out. They agreed with alacrity, and they stayed out." There was no reason to doubt this avowal. In the two and one-half years since he became head of the environmental agency, Mr. Ruckelshaus has exhibited an independence of judgment unusual in this Administration. He has also displayed a jealous regard for the statutory authority given him by Congress, which he has exercised, it is generally agreed, with firmness and fairness.

Qualities Shown

In short, he has demonstrated qualities needed by a director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the midst of the crisis of public confidence in Government that has followed the Watergate disclosures. He was appointed acting director of the F.B.I. today, replacing L. Patrick Gray 3d, who resigned under fire.

And that, almost certainly, is why President Nixon turned to Mr. Ruckelshaus to repair, as best he can in the two or three months he will occupy the post, the damage done to the F.B.I. and its reputation by Mr. Gray, who displayed little independence or firmness under pressure from White House aides.

Soon after Mr. Ruckelshaus was appointed head of the newly formed environmental agency, he told a large meeting of top executives from the nation's biggest industries that it was time for them to stop waiting for "ultimate" solutions to their pollution problems and to invest in the technology at hand. He told foot draggers that he would administer the laws fairly, but "I will make accusations when in my opinion they are warranted, and I will seek court action when there is no other reasonable recourse." He has done so, as suits prosecuted against big industry attest.

Assurance by President

At a White House news conference today, he set out on his new job in the same frame of mind. He said he would perform his duties honestly, fairly and vigorously, and that he had asked and received assurance from the President that "no matter who is involved in the Watergate case there would be no sparing of anyone."

Mr. Nixon said that what he wanted now as head of the F.B.I. was an administrator and a lawyer, and in the opinion of E.P.A. bureaucrats and lawyers, he has got both in Mr. Ruckelshaus.

Before serving (1967-69) in the Indiana House of Representatives, where, though only a freshman, he was chosen majority leader, he had been successively Deputy Attorney General of the United States, Assistant Attorney General and chief counsel in the office of the Attorney General.

In February, 1969, he was named Assistant Attorney General, in the civil division of the Department of Justice. He was a protégé of the tough-minded Attorney General John N. Mitchell. But it was his quality of conciliation that first brought him to public notice in the spring of 1970.

Protest Negotiator

Mr. Ruckelshaus was given the assignment of negotiating the logistics of a huge student protest, to take place on the Ellipse near the White House, against the Cambodian incursion. In contrast with the violence that marked the demonstrations the previous November, when the Administration took a face-'em-down-don't yield-an-inch stance during an antiwar protest, the 1970 rally was peaceful. Again, in New Haven, Mr. Ruckelshaus calmed a potentially ugly confrontation over the trial of Black Panther leaders.

Mr. Ruckelshaus has won a following in the press for two qualities notably wanting in this Administration—a sense of humor and candor.

Toward the end of his first year at the environmental agency when he was beginning to get criticism—not only from industry but also from Administration officials, such as former Secretary of Commerce Maurice L. Stans, because of his enforcement of environmental laws—Mr. Ruckelshaus was asked at a news conference whether he was feeling a "little isolated."

"I don't feel completely isolated," he replied, "but I don't feel surrounded either."

Speaks for the Record

He does not take refuge in "off-the-record" statements or "background" news conferences. Only once has he been known to take part in an off-the-record meeting with reporters, and then it was the sponsoring reporters who set the ground rules. This was also the only time he got in trouble.

Asked what the President had said to him in a recent meeting, he replied that Mr. Nixon had said he thought John B. Connally would be the Republican presidential nominee in 1976.

After the inevitable leak, he was asked what he had learned from the incident. "To eat lunch in my office," he replied.

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William D. Ruckelshaus, left, with Donald L. Ziegler, White House press secretary, at the news session yesterday at which Mr. Ziegler announced selection of Mr. Ruckelshaus to serve as acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.