

Richardson Called Again

Nixon's Chief Fireman

Washington

For the fourth time since he became president, Richard M. Nixon has reached out to Elliot L. Richardson, 52, to take over another of the hottest spots in government.

The President's surprise announcement yesterday that Richardson, who has been secretary of Defense for three months, would be nominated immediately to take over as attorney general and lead the government's Watergate investigation, has left the Pentagon in a state of shock.

The President's action has set in motion a search for a successor to the urbane Bostonian who, since January, 1969, has served as under secretary of State, secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and Secretary of Defense.

In each of these jobs, Richardson has gained a reputation within government for considerable management skill and personal integrity and these attributes undoubtedly would serve the President well at a time when his administration is being rocked by scandal.

Richardson has also demonstrated a talent for explaining the administration's position on a number of touchy and controversial issues.

If Richardson is quickly

confirmed by the Senate and moves across the river to the Justice Department before a new defense secretary is nominated, the Pentagon will be run in the interim by Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements.

Clements, 55, is a former Texas oil drilling contractor who has taken a hard-line position over the years on the need for a strong defense.

After being appointed on White House orders, he, too, has been at the Pentagon for only three months.

Clements shares all of the powers of the Secretary of Defense and is one of the candidates for the top slot. However, a number of officials said the search for a successor is focused mostly outside the Pentagon and estimated the chances at better than ever that someone other than Clements would get the post.

Concern over Richardson's departure and his successor was expressed at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing by Senator Stuart Symington (Dem.-Mo.). Symington, acting chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said he would prefer someone like Richardson to head Defense and not someone from the "military industrial complex."

With Clements having worked mostly on procure-

ment problems and relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Richardson's departure also might leave the Pentagon without an experienced top policy spokesman.

Because of the heavy emphasis the administration and Richardson has sought to put on Europe and U.S. foreign assistance programs in general, there was some speculation that Under Secretary of State Kenneth Rush, a former deputy Defense secretary, may be a candidate for the top defense job.

James R. Schlesinger, the new CIA director, is also being included in the speculation.

Richardson indicated to newsmen that he learned of his new assignment during weekend discussions with the President at Camp David. He said he would remain at the Pentagon until confirmed for the Justice

Department role.

Richardson is a Harvard Law School graduate, a former clerk to Second Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Learned Hand and Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, and a former Massachusetts lieutenant governor and attorney general.

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