

A Charge of 'Scared' U.S. Attorneys



RUCKELSHAUS
Risk of overreaction

Washington

Government attorneys have become so wary of scandal that some risk unfair prosecutions to avoid allegations of political pressure, said William D. Ruckelshaus, nominated to be deputy attorney general of the U.S.

Ruckelshaus said individuals may have been treated unfairly in at least two pending cases because government lawyers are "running scared." He declined to identify the cases.

Ruckelshaus has been working at the Justice Department in a special capacity pending his confirmation by the Senate.

In an interview, Ruckelshaus noted that Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson has ordered all political appointees in the department to stay out of politics.

Richardson also has taken steps to end the informal contacts between White House and department officials on policy matters, Ruckelshaus noted.

The department is moving toward new controls over FBI intelligence and data collection practices and may incorporate such measures in legislative proposals, he said.

Ruckelshaus said the mushrooming Nixon administration scandals create the risk of overreaction, particularly in the Justice Department.

More than any other Cabinet agency, the Justice Department has been tainted by the Watergate scandals because of allegations that

department officials joined in the coverup.

The department is and must be independent, Ruckelshaus asserted. But he said he fears some attorneys may reject even proper contacts with others inside and outside the government.

"Running scared is a pretty good definition of it," Ruckelshaus said. "I've heard from time to time from the local bar in the District of Columbia that there is a tendency on the part of some attorneys in the litigating division to be running scared, to be afraid of making an independent decision that might on the surface appear to be in some way unduly influenced."

In the great volume of government lawsuits, he said, it is inevitable "that somebody will be treated unfairly." The department needs to know from whatever source when that occurs, he maintained.

"I would hate to shut that off just because any contact might stand a chance of being viewed as undue influence from outside the government," he added.

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