

Saxbe Reported Resigning

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By Lawrence Meyer

Washington Post Staff Writer

Attorney General William B. Saxbe will resign his position to succeed Daniel P. Moynihan as U.S. ambassador to India, informed sources said yesterday.

Saxbe, who has served as Attorney General for less than a year and who is the fifth person to hold that job in the past 2½ years, would be the first Cabinet-level official to resign since President Ford took office last August.

In Columbus, Ohio, where he was attending the funeral of a friend, Saxbe declined to comment on news reports that he will soon resign. Saxbe told reporters that the White House would make an announcement "possibly later in the week" or "there might be nothing."

A spokesman for the Justice Department declined to comment last evening when asked if Saxbe is resigning. In the past, the department has issued denials in response to increasingly frequent inquiries about Saxbe's plans to resign. Its refusal to do so last night was considered significant.

Saxbe, 58, became Attorney General Jan. 4, replacing acting Attorney General Robert H. Bork, who took control of the department in October, 1973, after Elliot L. Richardson resigned rather than obey an order from President Nixon to fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Moynihan is expected to resign as ambassador to India to resume his position at Harvard University in time for the spring semester, which begins in February. His leave of absence is up then, and if he does not return, he will lose his tenure.

Saxbe told reporters in Columbus yesterday that he had met with President Ford for "some length" earlier in the week. After that meeting,

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which took place Monday morning, Saxbe told a Washington Post reporter inquiring about his plans that he would not resign as Attorney General unless offered another position equally "challenging." One of Saxbe's top aides, who was present for the conversation, said yesterday that Saxbe's response then indicated a change from his earlier statements that he would not resign.

On Monday night, Saxbe appeared at a dinner at the Indian embassy where he told another Washington Post reporter, Dorothy McCardle, "I would like to be ambassador to India. We have been to India five times in the past five years, and I find it endlessly fascinating." Well-informed government officials confirmed yesterday that Saxbe would be nominated to succeed Moynihan.

Rumors have circulated in Washington for several weeks that Saxbe would be among the first to leave the Cabinet when Mr. Ford begins reshaping it. Several persons have been mentioned as possible successors including Deputy Attorney General Laurence H. Silberman, Richardson, former Sen. Charles Goodell (R-N.Y.), former Under Secretary of Transportation John Robson, and James R. Thompson, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Although Goodell reportedly has expressed interest to friends in becoming Attorney General, some political observers question whether he would

be acceptable to conservative Republicans in view of the strongly liberal positions he took after being appointed to the Senate in 1968 by then Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller to fill the unexpired term of the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Goodell was out of the city last night and not available for comment.

Robson, a Republican who served as the first general counsel for the Department of Transportation before becoming under secretary in 1968, is a close associate of White House chief of staff Donald Rumsfeld.

Robson, who now practices law in Chicago, told a reporter last night, "I have no plans nor have I received any offer's to go to Washington."

Thompson, 38, has successfully prosecuted several political allies of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, including former Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner. Thompson was widely considered to be the Republican Party's leading candidate to oppose Daley, who is running for his sixth four-year term next spring. Thompson has announced, however, that he will not run for mayor.