

Chief of Staff Of CIA Probe 'Independent'

By William Greider
Washington Post Staff Writer

David W. Belin, the Iowa lawyer who is chief of staff for the presidential commission investigating the CIA, describes himself as "a philosophical independent conservative" with polite emphasis on the "independent."

People familiar with Belin's career as a Des Moines lawyer and a Republican Party strategist, plus his wide-ranging intellectual interests, predict that his temporary tenure in Washington will confirm the point.

Belin will not yet discuss the investigative strategy of the commission's staff, which is still being assembled, but he has set this goal:

"The No. 1 requirement is to have an independent staff of high capability and integrity."

Belin himself has a streak of independence in his past.

A Republican party loyalist, he campaigned for the Nixon-Agnew ticket in 1968—but declined to do so in 1972, when the GOP victory was overwhelming.

On the touchstone issue of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Belin was a "dove" long before that became a popular political position, indeed, even before President Johnson's Democratic administration entered the war.

On legal issues, he calls himself a "strict constructionist," but he played a role in winning a Supreme Court decision in 1967 that extended the constitutional right of competent legal representation for the poor. Belin also took a strong hand in the legal fight for reapportionment of Iowa's state legislature.

As a lawyer, he has concentrated on corporation work but his clients also include two Democratic congressmen from Iowa—Edward Mezvinsky of Iowa City and Berkley Bedell of Spirit Lake.

issue with some of the commission's own decisions.

Last month, Belin was offered a job in the Ford administration. He turned it down, but the White House returned with a request to take on the staff assignment with the commission chaired by Vice President Rockefeller. He and Rockefeller are not old friends, but Belin did provide political advice for Rockefeller's presidential campaigns in 1964 and 1968.

The commission, now a month old, is still getting security clearances for its staff, expected to be seven to 10 people. Belin said he took special care in selecting lawyers of substantial experience.

"We have to have a dual concern," he said, "a concern for the protection of effective intelligence gathering and for the individual rights of Americans and I expect every member of the staff to share those concerns."

The commission originally was given a deadline of April 1 but Rockefeller has hinted that the inquiry may need more time. Belin isn't concerned about time: he informed his law firm back in Des Moines—Herrick, Langdon, Belin, Harris, Langdon and Helmick—not to expect him back before July 1.

Belin, Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Michigan and an honors graduate of the Michigan law school, started out to be a concert violinist. He was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Sioux City, Iowa. After two years in the Army, including service in Japan as a violinist, he turned to business and law.

Belin's view of the current controversy is shaped in part by his close familiarity with the Kennedy assassination, his strong positions on Vietnam and his subsequent concern about Watergate.

"I look back on Nov. 2, 1963, as a tremendous psychological turning point," Belin said. "During the early '60s, there was a vibrant feeling in the country, a feeling of hope about the government and the people. Then with the assassination, followed by Vietnam, followed by Watergate, you have so many people who say, 'a plague on both your parties.' There's a great skepticism, a great cynicism

Among other things, the 46-year-old lawyer helped Bedell, a wealthy fishing tackle manufacturer, organize a private foundation called the Research Foundation for a Better America, it has given money to such varied projects as a self-help housing program run by Chicago blacks and a Quaker bail-bond release project in Des Moines.

Belin's service as one of 14 staff lawyers on the Warren Commission investigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination is what led to his appointment for the current inquiry. He got to know Gerald Ford, who was a member of the Warren Commission, and is the author of "November 22, 1963: You Are the Jury," a book that examines the assassination evidence and rebuts critics of the Warren Commission report, though it also takes



DAVID W. BELIN
... Iowa Republican

that people have about government. I don't."

The CIA investigation, Belin hopes, will "make some small contribution to the restoration of credibility in government."

On Vietnam, Belin said he and his wife, the former Constance Newman from Grand Rapids, Mich., were "doves" dating from the 1950s when she wrote a research paper at Michigan on the impossibility of maintaining French colonialism in Indochina.

"I was very, very anti-Lyndon Johnson and his approach there," Belin said. In 1968, he campaigned enthusiastically for Richard Nixon and served as chairman of the Iowa Lawyers for Nixon. But when they asked him to take a comparable position in the 1972 campaign, Belin declined.

"There were many Nixon policies that were very sound, the rapprochement with China, for instance," Belin said. "I felt the domestic policy they were following was wrong, particularly the approach of Agnew in attacking young people."

Belin is writing a second book, this one about the Republican Party and whether it has a future.

"One of my arguments," he said, "is that the Republican Party, which is so closely identified with business, does not take a very business-like approach in the marketplace of voters. We all knew that young voters were going to be important, yet Vice President Agnew attacked them. When the kids were raising cane about the war in Vietnam, a very legitimate concern, and Agnew attacked them, Mr. Agnew and I parted company."

Belin voted for Nixon in 1972 but became "very concerned" afterwards as the Watergate scandal developed, partly because one of his pet interests is openness in government. Belin's work on the Warren Commission staff taught him how difficult it sometimes is to get information from government agencies and he hopes that lesson will serve him in the CIA inquiry.

When Belin was appointed, his hometown newspaper, the Des Moines Reg-

ister, sent him off to Washington with this high praise:

"He is a man of integrity and we believe he will insist on freedom to dig out the facts. If he finds he cannot get the facts from CIA, we believe he will so report to

the public. If the commission does not agree with his findings, he also will make that evident to the public."

All that Belin will say on that question is that he is "a philosophical independent conservative."