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Saxbe Shifts On Probe Of Secrecy

Attorney General William B. Saxbe has revoked a commitment to the independence of a broad study of government secrecy. The lawyer in charge of it resigned in protest.

The dispute casts doubt on the future of the long-range project to assess the extent of government compliance with the 1967 Freedom of Information Act, requiring disclosure of information to the public.

Saxbe granted the Freedom of Information study unit almost total independence from department control, in a letter Feb. 19 to Jerry N. Clark, the lawyer he chose to head the \$300,000 research effort.

Clark and department officials said the agreement began to unravel about a month ago. Clark submitted his resignation Wednesday, and Saxbe accepted it, "with deep regret" Thursday. (29 MAY)

"I'm disappointed," Clark said in an interview. "They clearly wanted to depart from the original agreement and clearly wanted to assert greater Department of Justice control over the end product."

Saxbe's administrative aide, Bill Hoiles, said the Attorney General took a new look at the agreement after Deputy Attorney General Laurence Silberman raised questions about it.

The decision to revoke the commitment came because "the Attorney General and the deputy wanted to have some modicum of policy control," Hoiles said. "The complete grant of authority was excessive."

The developments brought a speedy rebuke from Rep. William S. Moorhead (D-Pa.), a leading congressional critic of government information policies.

"Apparently somebody at Justice got cold feet when it looked like they could not exercise control over the study unit's final product," he said.