

Insiders See Kleindienst On Way Out

10-20-72

By Sanford J. Ungar

Washington Post Staff Writer

Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst may be dropped from the Cabinet if President Nixon is re-elected, according to high-ranking Justice Department sources.

Despite the President's frequent expressions of confidence in Kleindienst, the sources said, Mr. Nixon is being pressed by some of his closest advisers to replace him with a lawyer who has had no connection with the Justice Department during the past four years.

The Attorney General is worried enough over this prospect that he has told some of his closest confidants that he will seek an immediate post-election meeting with Mr. Nixon to clarify the situation.

Rumors about Kleindienst's fate have been circulating widely within the Justice Department, causing considerable anxiety among high-level political appointees recently brought in by Kleindienst and promised they would be staying on beyond January in the event of a Nixon victory.

According to The Washington Post's sources, the removal of Kleindienst would be part of an effort "to change the whole image of the Justice Department" after the presidential election.

They said that there is widespread feeling at the White House that public confidence in the department has reached a new low, despite the latest FBI crime statistics and the

See KLEINDIENST, A5, Col. 1

KLEINDIENST, From A1

launching of new law-enforcement programs.

Some presidential advisers apparently feel that Kleindienst never overcame the effects of his marathon confirmation hearings last spring, which gave wide circulation to charges of political interference in the operations of the Justice Department.

High White House officials, including the President, were reportedly peeved when Kleindienst—without first consulting them—requested the reopening of his hearings after allegations that antitrust cases against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. were settled in exchange for financial support of the Republican National Convention.

Then, no sooner had Kleindienst been sworn in last June 13, after waiting four months for Senate confirmation, than the controversy erupted over the bugging of Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate.

Notwithstanding repeated assurances by Kleindienst and his aides that the federal investigation of the Watergate

affair has been a thorough one, there is apparently also concern about the department's credibility in that area, too.

Justice Department officials report that whenever they are on the road giving speeches, they are inevitably questioned about the Watergate and sometimes about ITT.

Kleindienst was campaigning for Mr. Nixon in California yesterday and could not be reached for comment on his prospects for staying in the Cabinet.

But several of his intimates, when questioned by The Washington Post, said the Attorney General has seemed "apprehensive" recently and that he apparently feels "that he's really not going to be AG for very long after the election."

Last week, at a reception for the wives of Justice Department and FBI officials, Kleindienst joked with some of his guests about "whether I'll still be here after the election."

Because the Attorney General has expressed considerable confidence in the President's re-election prospects, some people reason that

Kleindienst meant he did not feel confident about keeping his own job, not about a change of administrations.

The reports about Kleindienst's being dropped have also shaken up several assistant attorneys general who were persuaded to take their jobs despite the uncertainty of an election year.

"Frankly, if I didn't think that Dick Kleindienst would be staying on, I never would have taken the job," one said.

If Kleindienst does leave the Justice Department, The Washington Post's sources said, it is unlikely that he would take any other position in a second Nixon administration.

He has often privately expressed his disinterest in working at the White House, where has a number of political adversaries who opposed his nomination in the first place.

It is more likely, the sources said, that Kleindienst would return to private law practice either in his home state of Arizona or in Washington.

Kleindienst is not a wealthy man, and one former Justice Department aide pointed out yesterday that he would probably have "increased earning power" now.

One person previously mentioned as a possible nominee for Attorney General had Kleindienst failed confirmation was Clark MacGregor, now head of the Committee for the Re-election of the President. But the Watergate affair might also jeopardize his chances, The Washington Post's sources said.

They said a more probable candidate would be John Ehrlichman, now President Nixon's chief domestic adviser, who has said privately that he would like to be Attorney General.