

Stunning Collapse of Nixon Tape Strategy

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Coz and Ruckelshaus are Fired:  
Atty. Gen. Richardson Quits

By Robert S. Boyd  
Knight News Service

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Elliot Richardson resigned last night and President Nixon, in a stunning collapse of his efforts to compromise the battle over his Watergate tapes, fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, abolished Cox's office and fired all of his staff, and fired Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus.

The dramatic events left Washington in a state of shock and shattered the President's hopes of putting Watergate behind him while he handled the Mideast crisis and a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union.

In rapid-fire order late yesterday and last night:

- Nixon ordered Richardson to fire Cox because he disobeyed Nixon's instructions to stop seeking the Presidential tapes and papers.



Robert Bork

- Richardson refused, because he had promised the Senate, when he was confirmed as attorney general last May, that he would not interfere with Cox's operations. Instead, Richardson resigned.

- Nixon then ordered Ruckelshaus, as Richardson's deputy, to fire Cox. Ruckelshaus also refused and he was fired.

- Nixon named the third - ranking man in the Justice Department, Solicitor General Robert Bork, to be acting attorney general and ordered him to fire Cox.

- Bork notified Cox that he was fired and that the office of the special prosecutor, with a staff of nearly 100 lawyers and investigators, was abolished. Cox responded with a one-sentence statement: "Whether ours shall continue to be a government of laws and not of men is now for Congress and ultimately the American people."

- The FBI sealed off Cox's office to prevent any documents or records from being removed. Nixon said the Watergate investigation has been transferred back to the Justice Department.

These extraordinary events followed the President's announcement Friday night that he had struck a compromise on the tapes with the Senate Watergate committee—a compromise which Cox promptly rejected.

Cox spelled out his defiance in an extraordinary hour-long press conference nationally televised yesterday afternoon, vowing that he would never quit and threatening to seek a contempt citation against the President in federal court.

Members of the Senate Watergate Committee began to find fault with the proposed compromise.

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee accused Nixon of violating his pledge not to interfere with the independence of the special prosecutor.

By midafternoon, the compromise—then less than 24 hours old—was dead, and Nixon had decided to fire Cox and abolish the special prosecutor's office.

The President took this action because of Mr. Cox's refusal to comply with instructions given Friday night

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through Attorney General Richardson," White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler said.

The instructions to Cox were "not to seek to invoke the judicial process further to compel production of records, notes or memoranda regarding private presidential conversations," Ziegler said.

According to Ziegler, the President had tried to avoid a constitutional confrontation by making available a summary of his tapes to Congress and the courts, but Cox wouldn't agree.

"The action taken by the President in the spirit of accommodation that has marked American constitutional history was accepted by responsible leaders in Congress and the country," Ziegler said.

"Mr. Cox's refusal to proceed in the same spirit of accommodation, complete with his announced intention to defy instructions from the President and press for further confrontation at a time of serious world crisis made it necessary for the President to discharge Mr. Cox and to return to the Department of Justice the task of prosecuting those who broke the law in connection with Watergate."

The Justice Department will carry out the Watergate investigations and prosecutions "with thoroughness and vigor," he insisted.

Late yesterday afternoon, Richardson went to the White House for the show-down.

As he left the Justice Department he instructed his spokesman to announce that he had not agreed with Nixon's order to Cox not to pursue the tapes issue.

The White House had said Friday night that the compromise had been forwarded by Richardson and sought to give it his imprimatur.

Thus, when he stepped

into the Oval Office, his support for Cox was already a matter of public record.

Nixon told him that Cox must go.

Richardson replied that he would then have to resign, Ziegler said, "since he believed the discharge of Professor Cox to be inconsistent with the conditions of his confirmation by the Senate."

After returning to the Justice Department, Richardson wrote a letter to the President, saying that "circumstances leave me no alternative to the submission of my resignation as Attorney General of the United States."

"At the time you appointed me," Richardson wrote, "you gave me the authority to name a special prosecutor if I should consider it appropriate."

"A few days before my confirmation hearing began, I announced that I would, if confirmed, appoint a special prosecutor and give him all the independence, authority and staff support needed to carry out the tasks entrusted to him."

Richardson recalled that during the hearings last spring he repeatedly reaffirmed "my determination to assure the independence of the special prosecutor."

He told the senators that he would remove Cox only for "extraordinary improprieties" and pledged that, as attorney general, he would not "countermand or interfere with the special prosecutor's decisions or actions."

In his letter to the President, Richardson said he understood why Nixon felt Cox should be fired, but he added:

"I trust that you understand that I could not, in the light of these firm and repeated commitments, carry out your direction that this



William Ruckelshaus: Leaving office.



Elliot Richardson: After his resignation.

AP and UPI Photos

be done. In the circumstances, therefore, I feel that I have no choice but to re-

sign."

Nixon replied with a brief, one-sentence letter:

"Dear Elliot: It is with the deepest regret and an understanding of the circumstances which brought you to your decision that I accept your resignation."

With Richardson unwilling to fire Cox, Nixon next ordered his deputy, Ruckelshaus, to do it.

Ruckelshaus, the former Environmental Protection Administrator and acting chief of the FBI, who was sworn in only a few weeks ago, also refused what Ziegler called an "explicit directive to discharge Mr. Cox."

"He, like Mr. Cox, has been discharged of further duties effective immediately," Ziegler said.

Finally, Cox was notified of his dismissal by Solicitor

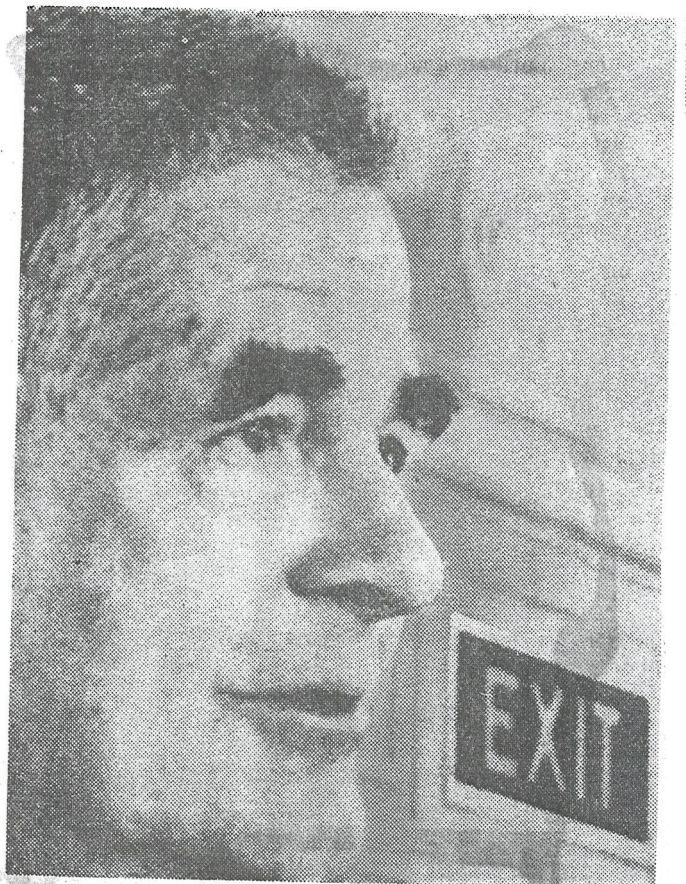
General Robert H. Bork, the third ranking man in the Justice Department, who was named acting attorney general. Bork is a former law professor from Yale University, who also took office only a few weeks ago.

An immediate victim of the crisis may be Vice President-designate Gerald Ford. The Michigan Republican, who characterized Nixon's tapes compromise earlier yesterday as "eminently sensible," must be confirmed by both Houses of Congress before he can take office.

With both houses controlled by Democrats, Ford's confirmation may be held up indefinitely — or at least until the President pays a terribly high price for his actions last night.

### What's the score?

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Archibald Cox: During news conference.