

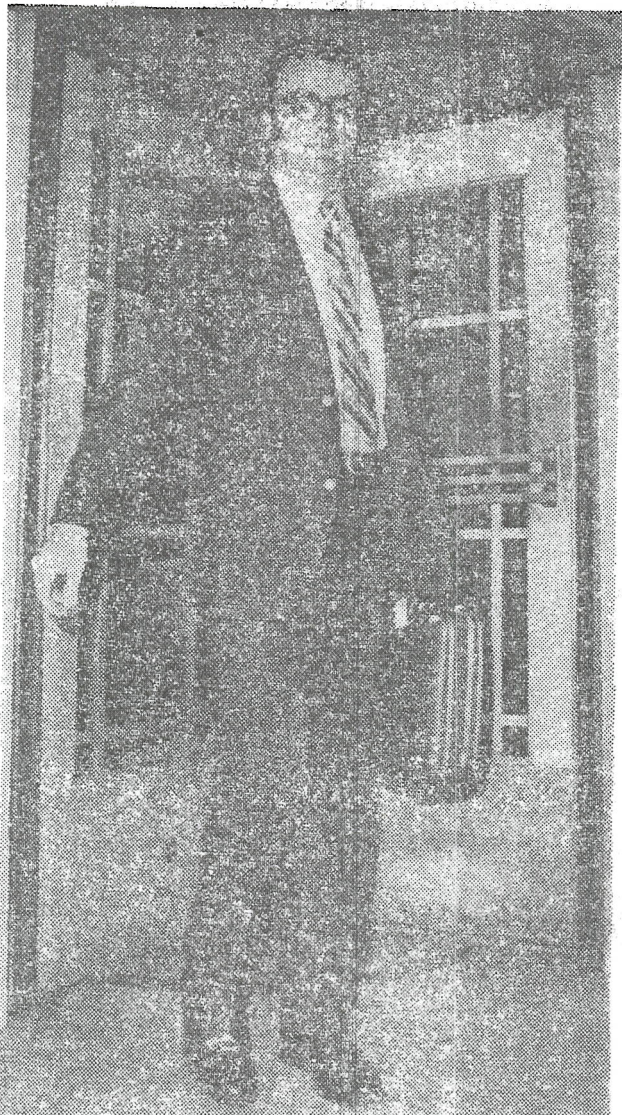


Associated Press

Elliot L. Richardson waves as he leaves the Justice Department last night.

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A Quiet Drama Played Out As Men Weighed Loyalties



United Press International

William D. Ruckelshaus leaves the Justice Department.

By Laurence Stern
Washington Post Staff Writer

A week of presidentially directed pressure to fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox ended yesterday in the dual resignation of Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and his deputy, William D. Ruckelshaus.

The intense White House efforts began Monday, according to authoritative sources, when Richardson was informed by a high-ranking presidential aide to dismiss Cox.

They ended last night when—after the resignations of the two top Justice Department officers—the White House succeeded in persuading Solicitor General Robert H. Bork to fire the special prosecutor.

In the intervening days a quiet drama was played out within the top echelons of the Nixon administration in which public men weighed their reputations and personal loyalties against the insistent demand of their President for compliance with his orders.

It was in this spirit that Richardson at mid-afternoon yesterday declined to comply with the President's instruction to fire the Watergate prosecutor.

And it was with the same attitude that Ruckelshaus at 5 p.m. yesterday responded to a phone call from White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., who said he was relaying an order from

his Commander-in-Chief to dismiss Cox. (Richardson had just returned from his White House meeting when the Haig call came in.)

Ruckelshaus informed Haig that he would not comply. An hour later he submitted his resignation to the White House.

"I am, of course, sorry that my conscience will not permit me to carry out your instruction to discharge Archibald Cox," Ruckelshaus wrote the President. "My disagreement with that action at this time is too fundamental to permit me to act otherwise."

In arguing the case for the dismissal of Cox, knowledgeable sources reported, Haig cited the pressures of international crises and indicated that the operations of

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Drama Played Out As Men Weighed Personal Loyalties

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the special prosecutor were impairing the administration's ability to function effectively.

"Your commander-in-chief has given you an order," Haig told Ruckelshaus when the deputy attorney general first expressed his reluctance to comply.

When the final scenario began to unfold at the beginning of the week, according to those familiar with the events, Richardson agreed to help work out a compromise plan for obtaining the nine disputed presidential tape recordings that are central to the case of the Watergate prosecutors.

The negotiations were closely held and centered on Richardson, Cox, White House legal adviser Charles Alan Wright and, in the later stages, Haig and the President.

Richardson agreed to try the negotiating route, according to Justice Department associates, in an effort to forestall the outright firing of Cox—a course that he knew would require his own resignation.

At no point, these sources insisted, did Richardson give his final blessing to the various compromise proposals. His view throughout was that the final decision was up to Cox.

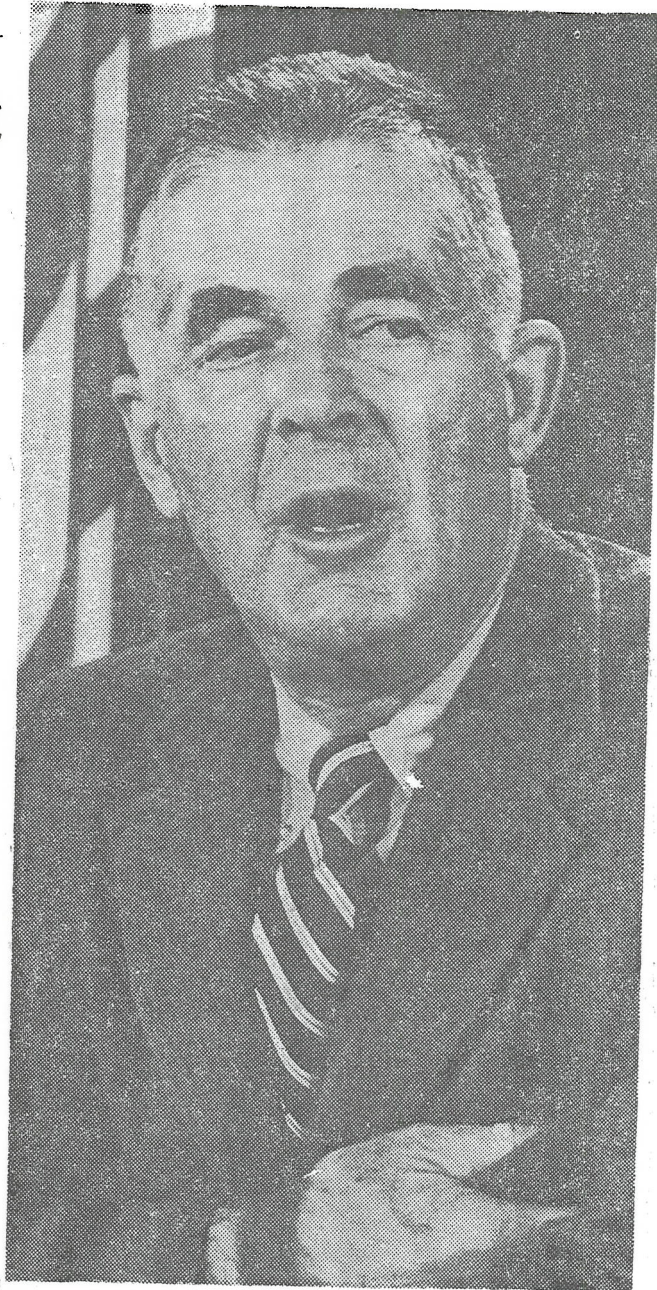
Under formal and written guidelines drafted by Richardson in collaboration with the Senate Judiciary Committee, Cox was given a clear guarantee against political interference from the Attorney General and anyone else in the administration.

The guidelines stipulated that "the Attorney General will not countermand or interfere with the special prosecutor's decisions or actions." Richardson also pledged that Cox would have the "final determination" and "complete authority" to challenge presidential claims of executive privilege.

It also stipulated at the time that Cox could not be removed from office aside from "extraordinary improprieties."

President Nixon, in announcing Richardson's nomination as Attorney General last April 30, said he would delegate to Richardson "full responsibility and authority for coordinating all federal agencies in uncovering the whole truth about this (the Watergate) matter . . ."

That pledge was made by Mr. Nixon in the very statement announcing the resignations of former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and former White House aides H. R. (Bob) Hal-



Associated Press

Prosecutor Cox tells a press conference of his plans in the Watergate tapes issue.

deman and John D. Ehrlichman.

In his resignation letter last night Richardson reminded the President of the commitments to give Cox free rein in the special prosecution of the Watergate case. "While I fully respect the reasons that have led you to conclude that the special prosecutor must be discharged, I trust that you understand that I could not in the light of these firm and repeated commitments carry out your direction that this be done," he wrote.

Throughout the week of negotiations between the White House, Justice and the special prosecutor, Cox stuck to his position that the tapes should be made accessible to the court and grand juries inquiring into the Watergate affair and the ensuing cover-up conspiracy.

Cox made it clear that he found the proposal far too confining to carry out his investigation properly. On Friday he tartly replied to Wright on the subject of the White House proposal: "Judging from the difficulties we have had in the past receiving documents, memoranda, and other papers, we would have little hope of getting evidence in the future."

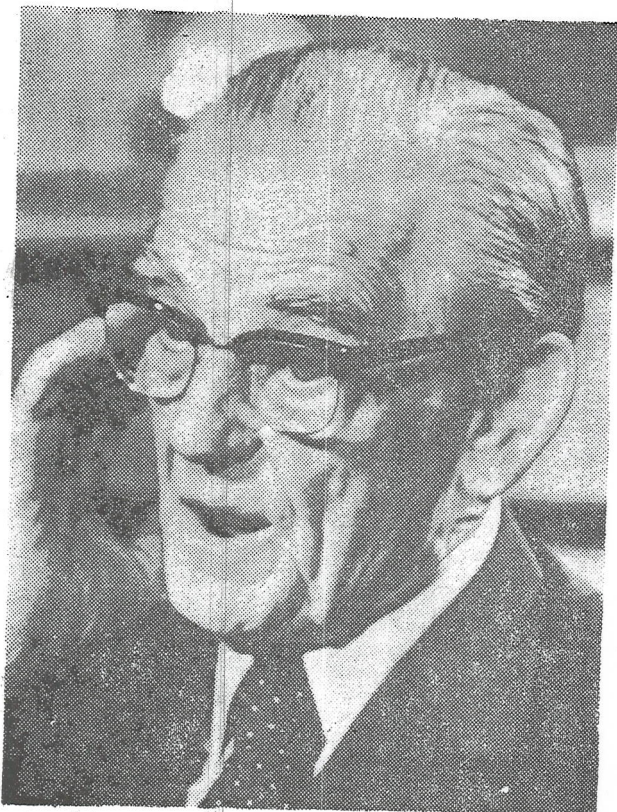
Wright replied, in the President's behalf, that "it is my conclusion from that letter that further discussions between us seeking to resolve this matter by compromise would be futile . . ."

At 7 p.m. Friday, it was learned, Richardson received a letter from the President asking him to direct Cox to abandon all efforts to obtain the tapes by judicial means. The Attorney General declined to comply and then refused the subsequent order to fire Cox.

Richardson delivered his final, formal refusal to the White House shortly after 4 p.m. yesterday. It was then that Haig put in the call to Ruckelshaus, followed by his refusal—and resignation.

When it was clear that Ruckelshaus would not accede to the President's wish, Haig's final question was, "where is Bob Bork?" He referred to the No. 3 man in the Justice Department, the solicitor general.

Bork got on the phone with Haig. Three hours later the White House publicly announced Bork's appointment as acting Attorney General and his dismissal of the stubborn Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox.



By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

Sen. Stennis is asked about proposed role as "verifier."