

Bill Ruckelshaus

Roving Utility Administrator Lasted 24 Days on Latest Job

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After being moved at the President's pleasure from one post to another, William D. Ruckelshaus thought he had finally found a home in the Nixon administration. A mere 24 days later, he stands evicted.

Ruckelshaus couldn't resist the all-too-prophetic wisecrack as he was sworn in Sept. 26 as the Justice Department's No. 2 man: "It's the first permanent job I've had in a while . . . I'm hoping against hope to hold onto it until Christmas."

Along with his boss, Elliot L. Richardson, and Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Ruckelshaus simply couldn't go along with President Nixon's handling of the Watergate tapes affair. According to White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, Ruckelshaus refused to obey a direct presidential order to fire Cox, so on Saturday Nixon fired Ruckelshaus. But Ruckelshaus says he resigned, and a Nixon letter to the solicitor general also says he resigned.

Ruckelshaus has asserted his independence of the White House before. He served two years as the first administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, a post in which he proved he could be both tough and independent. Ruckelshaus got the president's promise that the White House would keep its hands off that agency.

When acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III got involved in the Watergate cover-up scandal, it was Ruckelshaus to whom Mr. Nixon looked for a temporary successor to restore that agency's honor and morale. And again, Ruckelshaus quickly proved himself nobody's patsy. Within days, he strode into the White House to recover some missing FBI files. And he vowed that agents would not disdain any lead, no matter where it pointed, along the trail of Watergate.

Despite agreeing to yet a fourth job with the administration—he began at Justice as an assistant attorney general—Ruckelshaus admitted he was disillusioned and disturbed by events in the Nixon government. But he spoke of the importance of helping to restore the public's confidence in their federal institutions, and he obviously relished the prospect of working with Richardson, a man he described as "trying very hard to the best of his ability to do the right thing."

In person, Ruckelshaus is soft-spoken and always quick to smile—frequently by telling jokes on himself. His favorite anecdotes usually describe how his wife,



WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS
... independent path

Jill, a vivacious women's rights advocate and White House aide, has gotten the better of him somehow.

A native of Indiana, Ruckelshaus took a crack at the Senate in 1968, but Democrat Birch Bayh defeated him by 72,000 votes. Many observers believe he may try again in 1976 against another Democrat, Sen. Vance Hartke.

Ruckelshaus was born July 24, 1932, in Indianapolis, the son of John K. Ruckelshaus, a state legislator. He graduated from Princeton University in 1957 and Harvard University law school in 1960, spending two years in the Army, where he reached the rank of drill sergeant.

As soon as he got his law degree, Ruckelshaus became an assistant state attorney general, prosecuting antipollution and health violations. In 1967, he was elected to the Indiana House—and promptly was named the majority leader, the first freshman ever to achieve that post.

Though he talked fondly a couple months ago of going back to Indiana to teach or write a book, he said, "I would not want to have my department from government interpreted . . . as though I believed all was lost. The government has got to go on and continue to function."

"What I think the government has to do, the people in government, is make it clear that we are going to be absolutely honest in our dealings . . . that we are not going to cut any corners whatsoever, we're not going to shade any of these decisions in any way at all."

"And the only way that can be done at all is for government to disclose, to the maximum extent possible, the basis for their decisions."

And for that penchant for disclosure, it looks as if Bill Ruckelshaus will be going home after all.