

10/24/73

Richardson's Stand

'It's Up to American People'

Washington

Saying the very integrity of the government is at stake, former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson called yesterday for appointment of another special prosecutor to probe Watergate and related scandals.

Richardson, speaking at a press conference where he was cheered for two minutes by hundreds of career Justice Department employees, said the investigation should be conducted by someone in the same position of independence that Archibald Cox had.

Cox was fired Saturday on orders of President Nixon for continuing to seek tapes and notes of presidential conversations as evidence. Richardson, disagreeing with Mr. Nixon's "compromise" on the tapes issue and refusing to fire Cox, resigned.

The applause for Richardson, who had pledged to restore public confidence in the Justice Department, was a rare display of emotion from civil servants in the department's great hall, an auditorium usually given to dry, formal legal presentations.

The former attorney general made his comments before the White House announced that Mr. Nixon had reversed his position and would obey the appellate court ruling that he surrender nine tapes of his conversations with aides.

Afterwards, a former aide described Richardson as "emotionally spent," and said he would have no comment on the White House turnaround.

Asked whether Mr. Nixon

should be impeached, Richardson said the "ultimate judgment" is one for the American people.

His answer differed from that of other cabinet officers and many Republican office holders, who have called for restraint, urged patience and minimized the prospects for impeachment.

Saying he was not the person to make the judgment on impeachment, Richardson praised the "skill and firmness" he said Mr. Nixon had shown in dealing with recent international problems.

Richardson made these other points at the one-hour news conference:

- If he had been in Cox's shoes, he would have pressed for the tapes as vigorously as the special prosecutor did.

- He did not believe Cox' investigation was "out to get Richard Nixon," a primary reason, according to White House aides, for Mr. Nixon's mounting dissatisfaction with the special prosecutor.

- He confirmed that Cox had become interested in the \$100,000 contribution from Howard Hughes that Mr. Nixon's friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo said he had kept in safe deposit boxes for three years in Florida before returning it earlier this year.

Richardson's call for the appointment of another special prosecutor was supported by former Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus, who also resigned Saturday after refusing to fire Cox.

"There is a need for some special investigative process that will do the job fairly, vigorously and thoroughly," Ruckelshaus said.

LETTERS

At his press conference, Richardson released an exchange of correspondence he had last Friday and Saturday with Mr. Nixon showing that the former attorney general had made a last-ditch effort to save Cox by seeking further compromise.

In Mr. Nixon's letter, instructing Richardson to order Cox to make no further attempts to obtain the tapes or notes, the President had said he regretted "the necessity of intruding, to this very limited extent, on the independence that I promised you with regard to Watergate when I announced your appointment."

Richardson told newsmen he had two reasons for deciding "I could better serve my country by resigning" than remaining attorney general: He would have had to refuse Mr. Nixon's order to fire Cox, and he disagreed with the President's decisions that made such an order necessary.

After Richardson's press conference, the mood at the Justice Department seemed to quiet perceptibly. Talk of mass resignations died down, and it appeared that only Richardson and Ruckelshaus aides would be leaving over the clash with the White House.

Los Angeles Times

Cheered



Former Attorney General Elliot Richardson was applauded by his wife Anne and many others at his news conference; William Ruckelshaus' hands were full (right)

UPI Telephoto