

Special Prosecutor

When Congressional pressure compelled a reluctant White House last May to appoint a special prosecutor to delve into all the steamy recesses of the Watergate scandals, many in Washington wondered whether the austere Harvard Law School professor who was tapped for the job was tough enough to do it.

The doubts would have been fewer if more people remembered how he had quit as chairman of the Wage Stabilization Board in the Korean War after President Truman overruled the board on above-ceiling pay increase for coal miners in a political deal with John L. Lewis. As Solicitor General under President Kennedy, Mr. Cox refused to argue before the Supreme Court in a case where he felt the Government's position violated civil liberties.

That same stubborn dedication to a single standard of justice characterized his five productive months in a Watergate assignment he had defined at the outset as one of restoring confidence in the honor, integrity and decency of government.

Inevitably, Mr. Cox's zeal in that mission fast convinced the fearful men in the White House that he was out to "get Nixon," a hobgoblin they had to exorcise by getting Cox. Now that he has been fired for doing what was right and necessary, he is understandably reluctant to take on similar duties under Congressional or court auspices lest his personal involvement seem part of a political vendetta.

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After his scheduled testimony next week before the Senate Judiciary Committee, he can leave satisfied that his fairness and diligence as special prosecutor did do much to sustain respect for the rule of law he came to the capital to defend.