

Douglas Defends Right of Critics To Attack Government Leaders

By WARREN WEAVER Jr.

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 29 — Justice William O. Douglas said today that some national government leaders "get the idea that they sort of run the country, that they own the country" when in reality they are only "minor characters" compared to the people.

At a news conference in a paneled reception room of the Supreme Court, Mr. Douglas defended the right of critics to attack any branch of the Government and predicted a sound future for the nation as long as its leaders and citizens retain good will.

"It's just one of the risks of being in public office that people take out after you," Justice Douglas said. "That's their First Amendment right. As Harry Truman said, 'if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.' There's a lot of good American common sense in that."

The new conference was held in observance of Mr. Douglas, at 75 years old, becoming the Justice with the longest continuous service in the history of the high court: 34 years and 196 days. With him was his wife, Cathleen, 29. He offered her a chance to speak, but she declined.

Optimistic on Future

"I think the heart of America is sound, the conscience of America is bright and the future of America is great," the Justice said. "The thing that holds all of us together is not the wording of the Constitution or the separation of powers, it's the mucilage of goodwill."

Mr. Douglas told about 40 reporters who turned out to:

the unusual opportunity to interview a Supreme Court Justice that he had no plans to retire "although I will, of course, some day." When he recalled that Oliver Wendell Holmes had written some of his best dissents at 85, he added: "That's not an implied threat that I'm going to stay that long."

The Justice declined to answer a question as to whether a President is subject to different laws than is an ordinary citizen.

In response to a question about political pressure, Mr. Douglas said that it would be "unthinkable for a President or Vice President or Senator to call a member of this Court and say 'you've got to do so-and-so' or 'you should do so-and-so.'"

Justice Douglas wore a grey suit, a bright yellow shirt and a red and blue striped tie for the news conference television cameras. His wife wore a dark brown blouse, beige slacks and a heavy gold bracelet and earrings.

The Supreme Court, its longest-serving member said, is "a group that operates as a harmonious whole at the personal level and, at the professional level, engages in very fierce ideological conflict." The Justices' closed conferences can be "long and loud," he added, with "talk that sounds bitter but only about the ideas at issue."

Having achieved longevity in historic degree, Justice Douglas dismissed it as the rough equivalent of winning competitions. "when I was a boy" for swallowing goldfish.