

Saxbe May Succeed Richardson

Washington

Senator William B. Saxbe (Rep. Ohio), frequently an outspoken critic of President Nixon's policies, said yesterday the White House has sounded him out about becoming attorney general and he has expressed interest in the job.

Saxbe confirmed that White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig asked him if he were interested and that the FBI is conducting a check into his background.

But he stressed he has had no firm offer from Mr. Nixon.

Asked at a White House news briefing whether Saxbe is being considered for the post, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said, "I don't have any announcement to give you."

Last night, however, Senate sources said that the President will offer Saxbe the post today.

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In an interview, Saxbe was asked if he would want to ask Mr. Nixon if he were innocent of Watergate involvement before taking the job.

"Oh, I think we would have to have a full discussion of a lot of things," he said. "Obviously we would have to have a lot of mutual confidence and trust, and I have never discussed any of these issues with the President."

Saxbe, however, in the past has compared Mr. Nixon's statements on Watergate to those of the piano player in a bawdy house who says he has no idea of what's going on upstairs.

And during the Christmas bombing over North Vietnam in 1972, Saxbe said Mr. Nixon "must have taken leave of his senses" — the very phrase Nixon attributed to television commentators at his news conference Friday night when he complained of "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting."



AP Wirephoto

WILLIAM SAXBE
Senator from Ohio

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Saxbe, 57, is a former three-term Ohio attorney general. He recently announced that he would not seek a second term in the Senate, a job he found frustrating.

Nomination of a senator as successor to Elliot L. Richardson, who resigned rather than fire special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox would mute criticism in the Senate.

"He comes across as Mr. Integrity and Mr. Independence," Senator Daniel K. Inouye (Dem-Hawaii), a member of the Senate Watergate committee, told a reporter. He said such an appointment would be a "smart move."

"It would satisfy critics and assure us of an independent attorney general," Inouye said.

Chairman John G. Tower of the Senate Republican policy committee, said Saxbe would make "a top grade choice."

Tower, from Texas, said his "only reservation" was that Saxbe's seat would be filled by an appointee named by Ohio Governor John Gilligan, a Democrat who almost certainly would name a Democrat.

"Bill has been known to use strong language," he said of Saxbe. "But he's an objective man. He calls them as he sees them."

Saxbe said Haig asked if he would be interested in being named to succeed Cox as special prosecutor "but that was disposed of in the first five minutes. I'm not interested. I wouldn't give up my seat in the Senate. I don't think I'm qualified."

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