

Saxbe: Is Justice A Stepping Stone?

By Julius Duschka
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Early in October, Senator William B. Saxbe (Rep-Ohio) announced that he would not seek re-election in 1974 to a second term in the Senate. He later described the Senate as "a paper tiger, full of hot air."

But today, a month later, Saxbe finds himself making plans to take over the Justice Department instead of returning to his cattle-breeding farm and law practice in Mechanicsburg, a small Ohio town northwest of Columbus.

Saxbe's selection by President Nixon to succeed Elliot Richardson as attorney general was surprising not only because of the senator's desire to leave public life but also because of his outspoken criticism of Nixon in the past.

Last December, when Nixon ordered the bombing of Cambodia, Saxbe said that it

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looked as if the president had "taken leave of his senses."

And last April, when Nixon was protesting that he knew nothing of Watergate, Saxbe said that was "like the guy playing piano (in a bawdy house) to say he didn't know what was going on upstairs."

Brutal necessity seems to have drawn Nixon to Saxbe, and Saxbe appears to have taken the job of attorney general out of a sense of challenge and political opportunity.

Before deciding to leave the Senate, Saxbe had thought about running for president in 1976. In mid-October he told an interviewer: "Even if I hadn't

been able to win the nomination perhaps I might have influenced the thinking and policies of the person who would have gotten elected."

Now, if his stewardship of the Justice Department is as straightforward, outspoken and honest as his record in the Senate, and before that as attorney general of Ohio and as a state legislator, Saxbe's up-to-now rather idle dreams of the presidency could have a chance of being fulfilled.

As for his public comments on the attorney generalship, he has said: "It is a challenge; a challenge that I like. It is a personnel job. It is a management job. It requires an understanding of lawyers, and I have probably hired a thousand lawyers in my days as attorney general (of Ohio)."

In Saxbe, Nixon found a Republican with a reputation for independence but also a Republican with conservative views on domestic policy similar to his own.

Saxbe is a law-and-order man who supports the death penalty and who has advocated even tougher anti-crime legislation than Nixon.

Saxbe is also a firm believer in the free-enterprise system. He takes a stoical view of life as being "tough and often unfair" and speaks scornfully of "the misery lobby that fattens on the frailties of man."

And despite Saxbe's disparaging remarks about the Senate, he still is a member of the club and his nomination is not likely to run into any serious objections during confirmation proceedings.

So, as one looks more carefully at the Saxbe nomination, it makes considerably more sense than appeared at first. For Saxbe there is national attention that could lead to a presidential nomination. For Nixon there is Saxbe's inde-



The public face of Attorney General designate Saxbe after he agreed to join the Nixon team



pendence, tempered by a basic conservatism, and an almost sure shot at Senate confirmation.

At 57, Saxbe is a rugged, balding man with a prominent nose and an openness and genuineness about him that is refreshing in Washington.

Saxbe grew up in Mechanicsburg, where his father was a cattle dealer. A graduate of Ohio State University and of its law school, Saxbe was an Army bomber pilot during World War II.

Elected to the Ohio House of Representatives at 29, Saxbe became speaker when he was only 37. Before being elected to the Senate in 1968, Saxbe was attorney general of Ohio.

But Saxbe found the Senate a disappointment almost immediately. Arriving in Washington at the still relatively young age of 53, Saxbe soon realized that a freshman senator counted for little.

He quickly made his mark in the Senate, however, with his sharp tongue and his often quixotic stands on controversial issues.

Saxbe had hardly arrived in Washington before calling for an early withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, but not for any high moral reasons. He had simply concluded that the United States could not win the war in Vietnam. Although he opposed construction of nuclear carriers, Saxbe was



and still is a supporter of a strong military.

His domestic proposals have included reform of congressional procedures for considering the federal budget, and the appointment by the President of an energy czar with wide-ranging powers to allocate gasoline and oil supplies.

An early advocate of stringent government efforts to allocate fuel supplies, Saxbe made a speech less than two weeks before his nomination severely criticizing Nixon's failure to act decisively on energy problems.

When a reporter asked Saxbe after he talked with

Nixon last week whether the president had made any "observations" on his past critical remarks, Saxbe replied, "Yes, and I said, well that he would have to take me warts and all."

Senator William Saxbe's attitudes toward the Nixon Administration during the past years have been varied—mostly covering the range from puzzlement and consternation to outright disapproval