

Attorney General—Designate

Not Typical Nixon Appointee

By Susanna McBee

Washington Post Staff Writer

He chews tobacco, plays the fiddle, talks like an earthy rancher (which he is), and dispenses barbed criticisms like buckshot.

He's not the archetypical Nixon administration appointee. But some colleagues think that Sen. William Bart Saxbe, the maverick Republican from Ohio, was tapped by the President Nov. 1 to be the new Attorney General for the very reason that he is known to be a Nixon critic.

Saxbe, 57, who had announced just last month that he would resign from the Senate when his term ends next year, "comes across as Mr. Integrity and Mr. Independence," said Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), a member of the Senate Watergate Committee.

His independence, at least in public statements, is well documented.

His best known comment came after President Nixon resumed the bombing of North Vietnam at Christmastime, 1972: "He's taken leave of his senses," Saxbe was quoted as saying although he told friends later he really said the President had "lost his f--- mind."

"Why did you say that?" an Ohio friend asked.

"Aw, hell, I didn't mean anything personal by it," Saxbe insisted. "That's just the way we talk in the country."

Another example: when White House Aide Bryce Harlow tried to sell Congress an unpopular administration bill a few months ago, Saxbe scoffed, "Harlow couldn't peddle a-- on a troop ship."

Saxbe once called the Nixon administration "one of the most inept in history." He said the President was not being "altogether honest" during the campaign last year in promising no new taxes, and, in connection with Watergate, he compared Mr. Nixon with



by Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

Saxbe: Nixon critic now set to be Attorney General.

"the man who plays piano in a bawdy house and says he doesn't know what's going on upstairs."

He has also taken potshots at his own club — Congress itself — calling it for the most part a "fraud on the American taxpayers" because, he says, it passes bills without adequate financing.

Despite his outspokenness, he is well liked by his fellow Senators and could ordinarily be confirmed with little trouble if it were not for a move of liberal Democrats to hold up his nomination until Congress decides whether to pass a bill creating a fully independent special Watergate prosecutor.

He might also face trouble over a Hong Kong newspaper report last Aug. 23 that quoted him as saying that if the White House Watergate tapes "are incriminating, they should be

destroyed, and I'm sure he [President Nixon] will." Saxbe says he does not recall saying that and denies "advocating any illegal activity."

Saxbe was born June 24, 1916, in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, a town of about 1,900 not far from Columbus where he inherited several hundred acres from his cattle buyer father. Until he accepted the Cabinet nomination, he had planned to return there to farm, raise cattle, and practice law.

He was elected to the Ohio House of Representatives when he was 29 and became majority leader five years later and Speaker of the House when he was 37. He served eight years as Ohio Attorney General and was elected to the United States Senate in 1968.

For the last three years, according to an aide, he has been dissatisfied with the Senate and his own lack of

power. He saw the Senate as archaic and thought the prime interest of each senator was his own survival.

Part of his frustration arose from his inability to secure passage of what he considered major legislation — a criminal justice bill and a measure to improve the appropriation process in Congress, among others.

Another part grew out of his unvarnished disgust at administration actions in the Watergate scandal. He once said the Nixon aides involved in it "should be given clown suits" and, on another occasion, lamented, "Nixon had a chance to put businessmen back in the saddle and make the free enterprise system respected again. He blew it."

Still, on many legislative issues he was an administration loyalist. He voted against Mr. Nixon's nomination of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. to the Supreme Court, but he supported his nomination of G. Harrold Carswell and William H. Rehnquist.

Since he was named as Attorney-General designate, his public comments have been closer to the administration line.

At a news conference he held at the White House last Wednesday, the day before his nomination was announced, he said he was "satisfied that any necessary information will be available from tapes or documents."

He also said the President's offer to give the Watergate prosecutors information from the tapes is "reasonable" and that after questioning Mr. Nixon, he was "also satisfied that the President has acted honorably in the situations that have arisen since Watergate."

Asked later if he thought Mr. Nixon acted honorably in every particular incident involving Watergate, Saxbe

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said, "I didn't get into the details. Certainly, I didn't have a checklist."

He added, "All I had was a general man-to-man confrontation: he says, 'I am telling the truth. I'll cooperate on any investigation.' I say, 'That's good enough for me.' And we've got to start from there."

If Saxbe survives the controversy over the Watergate tapes and the special prosecutor, he may face a technical question about his ability to take the Cabinet post. Article I, Section 6 of the Constitution says a member of Congress cannot take a "civil office" if a pay increase for that office has been voted during his term. Cabinet pay was increased in 1969, the first year Saxbe served in the Senate. But the Justice Department has said the problem can be eliminated through remedial legislation.

He also faces questioning about some of his past financial dealings. Shortly after he was elected to the Senate, he bought 400 shares of stock in the Bally Corp. of Chicago, a pinball and slot-machine manufacturing firm, on the advice of Sam Klein of Cleveland, whom his aides said he relies on for investment suggestions.

A year later he sold the stock at a small loss after learning that one of the company's officers was linked to organized crime.

Some colleagues cannot understand why Saxbe would try to take a post that for the last two years has been in constant turmoil. One staffer explains, "He knew that if he retired, he'd be bored to death in three weeks."

Saxbe has his own answer: "I have been around here five years, bitching about what I would do if I had the opportunity. All at once, they give me the ball. Should I throw it away? It's not something you walk away from."