

What Now for Ruckelshaus?

By Mary McGrory
Washington Star News

Washington

William D. Ruckelshaus, former deputy attorney general, former acting FBI director and former Environmental Protection Agency administrator, has, in the line of high government duty, occupied some pretty fancy quarters.

Now he works out of a small, windowless office in the Washington law firm of some Indiana friends who took him in after the brusque termination of a brilliant official career.

Ruckelshaus' refusal to fire special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox was accomplished in one of the immortal lines of Watergate prose.

"Your commander-in-chief is giving you an order," White House Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig Jr. said to Ruckelshaus, just after then Attorney General Elliott L. Richardson had declined to behead his old friend and law professor.

"He's a military man," Ruckelshaus mused the other day, "and it was natural for him. I don't know whether the thing is on tape or not, but I think I said to him, 'That's an interesting way to put it.'"

Ruckelshaus was prepared for the moment that was to



WM. D. RUCKELSHAUS
"Clash of principles"

make him famous. He had thought a great deal about it and he referred Haig to the next in line, Solicitor General Robert Bork, who was to do the deed.

What Ruckelshaus was not prepared for was the flood of mail and praise that has washed over him since.

He received 4000 letters, all of which, with the efficiency that made him one of the ornaments of the Nixon Administration, he has answered.

"Nothing like it has ever happened to me," he said,

still moved, still marveling. "It came right out of people's stomachs. It came from everywhere, and I got one from the nun who taught me in the second grade. There was something out there, just waiting, and some chord was struck. It reaffirmed people's faith in the primacy of the law."

Only six were hostile, and four of those, Ruckelshaus notes wryly, were from his native Indiana, where an act of conscience in defiance of Richard Nixon is less prized than in Massachusetts, Richardson's backyard.

Ruckelshaus, like Richardson, is foreclosed from an immediate political future in his state. Ruckelshaus took the pledge for 1974 last April when Nixon, reaching out for one of the few figures of unassailable integrity around him, tapped Ruckelshaus to fill the muddied shoes of L. Patrick Gray,

the acting FBI director. Democrats howled that he was being built up for a race against Senator Birch Bayh in 1974, and Ruckelshaus vowed not to run.

He is most frequently asked about impeachment. Having, during his 80 days as FBI chief, seen some of the Watergate evidence, he refuses to comment.

"Some people are furious and want me to rip off the President's head," he reports, "But I will not do it. Other people want to respect the presidency at all costs, and some are just plain confused."

Mrs. Ruckelshaus still works at the White House as a special assistant to counselor Anne Armstrong.

"Both Jill and I thought it was very important for her to continue so that people would understand that was nothing personal."