

Saxbe-- A Testy Tiger?



In the Senate says Saxbe, "you get lumps for nothing"

Washington

For almost one whole hour, William Saxbe, the nation's newest attorney general, was a pussycat. Settled into an armchair in his living room, washing down a hunk of fruitcake with black coffee and munching peanuts, the former farmer from Mechanicsburg, Ohio, was perfectly willing to pose for pictures and trade chitchat with his visitors.

Once the talk turned to tougher topics, however, and Saxbe was asked to comment on such matters as alleged government erosion of individual freedoms, the Kent State shootings, the actions of his predecessor, Elliot Richardson, and President Nixon and Watergate, the pussycat changed into a testy tiger, claimed an "invasion of privacy" and unceremoniously invited his visitor to "just leave . . . just go."

It was 7:05 p.m. when the 57-year-old former Ohio Senator with the balding pate and a proclivity for pungent statements greeted a reporter from Women's Wear Dai-

for and about
people

ly. He was pooped.

Taking over the Justice Department hasn't been easy so far. His first day on the job was marred by a confrontation with a policeman, who hit him with a citation for the expired inspection ticket on his government-provided limousine. When Saxbe identified himself, the officer replied, "The attorney general of what?"

The next day he was criticized for failing to realize there was a memo from energy chief William Simon directing that the use of federal limos would cease on Jan. 1.

In addition to these petty annoyances, Saxbe now has a schedule somewhat differ-

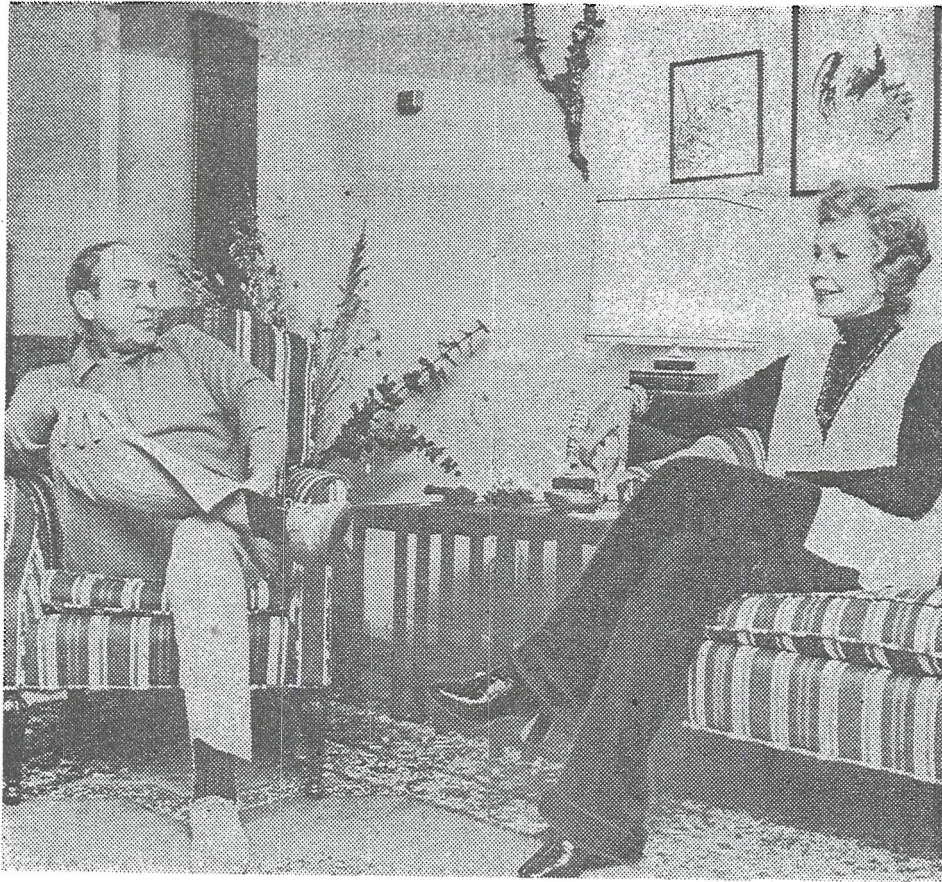
ent from what he originally hoped, to be doing when he announced last September that he would retire from the Senate at the expiration of his term. He had looked forward to retiring to a town of 1900 citizens, doing a little ranching and quietly practicing law. It hasn't worked out that way.

"It's rough," he said. "I'm really puttin' in time. I get there 'round 9. Don't leave 'til 6 and I'm glad to leave."

In addition to the added job pressures, Saxbe took a \$7500 cut in salary from his \$42,500 Senate pay.

"Haven't noticed it at all," he said, having fortified himself with another steaming cup of coffee,

which he stirred with a fork. "I'm still makin' a lot of money. I've been savin' \$1000 a month all along, investing it in a farm and beef cattle back home."



Asked whether raising beef is a good way to beat the high price of meat, he replied:

"Nope. We only ate one of our cows. The one that got hit by a car."

Saxbe's wife, Dolly, born Ardath Kleinhaus, is from Toledo. Gregarious and lighthearted, she was quick to agree to an interview at home, but getting into the Saxbe apartment turned out to be half the battle. It is an extremely well-guarded arrangement in southwest Washington, is secured by a checkpoint, barred lobby doors and elevators with locking buttons.

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Dolly confesses it is not her idea of home sweet home, but she's managed to decorate it with brilliant colors and at least a dozen of her own cheerful paintings.

Blithely, she conducted the visitor on a tour, with Saxbe reluctantly tagging along in his Hush Puppies. In the bedroom, one is startled by a full-length mirror facing the bed. Above the headboard hangs a painting of a reclining nude.

Dolly, who did not execute this particular canvas, looked at her visitor and winked.

"Inspiration," she said.

The Saxbes had lived in a four-story house until Saxbe announced he was leaving the senate.

He had said he was "fed up" with the phony political talk, the difficulty in getting things done, the stand-offishness of the White House and the way men voted for bills they privately disliked in order to curry favor with constituents.

He had called Congress "a fraud on the American taxpayer because it passes bills without adequate financing," and he had been frus-

trated in his attempts to pass a criminal justice bill. He has also expressed disgust with the White House scandals.

"I thought I could spend my time better elsewhere," said Saxbe. "I didn't like the pace of Senate business. You'd get a lot of lumps for nothing."

"I didn't like worrying about constituents' problems, running errands, all the social work."

Why, then, did he accept the Nixon appointment as attorney general, a job which would make the whole nation his constituency and place him cheek by jowl with an administration he had severely criticized?

"It's the symbol of the legal profession in the country, and it's important that it be run well."

"And good, solid administration of the Justice Department is the only thing that's going to raise the doubts of the people . . . I mean remove the doubts. The attorney generals who preceded me have not really had the time to get things across that they wanted to do."

In private, some GOP sen-

ators fear that the garrulous Saxbe might talk himself into trouble. Does he now regret such statements as likening Nixon to a piano player in a whore house and labeling John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman as "Nazis"?

"Hell, no," he replied. "Life's too short to regret statements you've made."

Does he feel this country might have been headed for a police state?

"I'm not sure that some of them, like Dean, Haldeman and Segretti, wouldn't have contributed to one, but they wouldn't have gotten very far. They were bound to fail."

"What I see in the White House is not corruption. Agnew was involved in corruption, but what I see in the White House is just plain stupidity. No one was seizing power."

In Saxbe's acceptance speech, he referred to the need for the government to guarantee certain freedoms. Had the administration eroded some of those rights, the right to privacy, for example?

"Well, that's not exactly true," said Saxbe. "You've

Restoring confidence in the President is "not my problem," said the senator, pictured here with his wife



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got a very unusual situation here. Now where do you see it's eroded?"

Saxbe reacted with total silence when his visitor mentioned political-enemy lists, telephone taps, arrests of newsmen and the use of tax returns as political weapons.

Would Saxbe's position as a former Ohio National Guardsman be a conflict of interest in the reopened investigation of the shootings at Kent State University?

"I don't see how," he said. "They're on their own. I think they should exhaust every possible source in the investigation." (On Nov. 18, Saxbe publicly opposed the decision of then Attorney General Richardson to reopen the case and said, if he were AG, he would stop the investigation. Privately, he told Sen. John Tunney (Dem-Calif.) that it was an ongoing investigation that could not be halted.)

Would he have fired Archibald Cox, or would he have resigned had he been in Richardson's shoes?

"No, no. To everything."

Does he admire Richardson for what he did?

"Not particularly," said Saxbe. "Look, I don't want to be getting hostile, but I am."

Does he think Nixon should appear before the Ervin committee?

"Look, I can't answer that. Besides, it's been a long, tough day. I can tell you one thing. This is the last interview I'm going to do at home in the evening. I thought you were going to come over, have a drink, see how we live and take some pictures."

"You're asking me in-depth questions I have to deal with all day in the office and I don't want to have to think about when I come home at night. It's an invasion of privacy."

"Honey, why don't you just go and relax," suggested Dolly.

Saxbe peered at his visitor.

"I'm terminating this interview," he said. "Why don't you just leave? Just go."

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