

But Does It Play In Peoria?

By Jeannette Smyth

After several jokes about running for President in 1976, Elliot L. Richardson made a cautious speech last night in which he warned against cynicism toward politics and had some hard words for White House politicians he did not name.

The former Attorney General told 300 dinner guests at the Federal City Club that those politicians "really didn't know what politics was about. Most of their experience was from being advance men," an apparent reference to members of the White House staff and their departed leaders, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. "They thought that everything was manipulable . . . of course, it really isn't in a country like this," said Richardson, who is fresh from a nationwide lecture tour.

"This kind of calculating approach fails to realize that you can't play a three-cornered billiard shot in a country like this," Richardson continued, "unless the table is warped and the cues are pitted. When I see some one like that, it impresses me not merely as cynical, but as the kind of amateur I used to associate with what we called 'drugstore cowboys.'"

Richardson said that in his travels, since he resigned last October rather than follow President Nixon's order to fire then-Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox, he has come to feel that cynicism toward government threatens to overtake people's patience and fairness in "withholding judgment" on Watergate matters until all the evidence is in.

"I feel this country is closer than ever to becoming what it can be," Richardson said, "but it can also be true that we're closer than ever to losing it all."

Earlier, during cocktails, Richardson had been lionized with cries of "Hello, Mr. President!" He and former deputy attorney general William D. Ruckelshaus, another victim of the



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

Elliot Richardson, left, with Mr. and Mrs. William Ruckelshaus at last night's dinner at the Federal City Club.

"Saturday night massacre," were being honored with the Federal City Club's distinguished service awards.

After filet mignon and Gallo Hearty Burgundy, Fitzhugh Green, a club board member and associate administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, introduced Ruckelshaus, his former boss at EPA, with praise for his "gallant act" in refusing to fire Cox.

"Elliott Richardson and I have a lot in common," Ruckelshaus said. "Neither one of us could hold a job. Both of us were heroes." Of Richardson's lecture tour

Ruckelshaus joked, "It was apparently a testing ground for 1976, but in reality he was to be a stalking horse for me."

He said Richardson's choice of the issues would be based on page one newspaper stories. The "various themes" would be tested to see if they "played in Peoria." "I support the President. He will not last the term. He will last the term. He may be impeached. He should be impeached. He will be impeached. He will never be impeached."

Ruckelshaus drew gales of laughter from the audience, which included Alice

Roosevelt Longworth; White House counsel Leonard Garment; McGovern campaign financier Henry Kimmelman, former New York Sen. Charles Goodell, and community activist Msgr. Geno Baroni.

Richardson responded that "the whole list plays in Peoria," but "Every time I try out your name, they think I'm you. When I tell them you're taller and younger and handsomer, they don't believe it. They want me."

According to published reports, Richardson is trying to put a little more humor in his speeches.