

SAXBE MAY LIMIT TALKS WITH PRESS

**Aide Cites Criticism Over
Offhand Remarks Made
at Weekly Briefings**

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WASHINGTON, April 24—Attorney General William B. Saxbe, faced with mounting criticism of the blunt and offhand remarks he has made to the press, may be changing or perhaps even abandoning his routine of regular weekly meetings with reporters.

Jack W. Hushen, the chief spokesman for the Justice Department, said this afternoon that Mr. Saxbe would probably "continue to meet with groups of reporters." He said, however, that the weekly Wednesday morning "briefings" over coffee and doughnuts, which have produced most of Mr. Saxbe's controversial remarks, were "never meant to be" institutionalized.

"There may be some modification," he said. "He's aware of what's being said, both editorially and within the department."

Blunt Words From Illinois

In the four months since he became Attorney General, Mr. Saxbe has been criticized by several national Jewish organizations, which accused him of anti-Jewish for a remark he made about "the Jewish intellectual" an the Communist party; by the president of the American Bar Association, for his remark that Patricia Hearst was a "common criminal," and by an assortment of newspaper editorials.

One newspaper, the Decatur Herald in Decatur, Ill., suggested last week, "If Mr. Saxbe insists on being so blunt perhaps it is time somebody was blunt with him—and told him in plain words to 'shut up.'"

Mr. Saxbe has been criticized within the Justice Department as well. The general view among the department's leadership, according to many top officials, is that Mr. Saxbe should tone down or eliminate his off-the-cuff comments and that he should consider gradually ending or somehow altering the briefings he has held with reporters.

Last week, in a speech describing the work of a public information officer, Mr. Hushen commented, "There have been a few stumbles as the new Attorney General has come to grips with his job, some of which made the press office reach for the aspirin bottle."

'Sense of Honesty' Cited

Mr. Hushen went on to say, however, that Mr. Saxbe "is bringing with him a deeply ingrained sense of honesty, a strong feel for the little man and a policy of letting the public know what he is doing."

Another official, high in the department hierarchy, took a somewhat similar view. He said that Mr. Saxbe certainly "makes some remarks that I



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William B. Saxbe

wish he wouldn't make" and that there was a danger that Mr. Saxbe might prejudice some criminal cases. At the same time, he said that he found Mr. Saxbe's statements "refreshing," to the extent that they seemed to be coming from a "free spirit."

Other high-ranking officials, who all wished their names to be withheld, were less charitable.

"It's an embarrassment," said the head of one section. "It reminds me of those old signs saying 'think ahead' — with the last three letters scrunched around the bottom," said another.

The officials disagreed, however, about the impropriety of Mr. Saxbe's tendency to speak out.

Morale Found Low

A few spoke bitterly, saying that department morale was low enough anyway, in the wake of the resignation last fall of Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and the previous disclosures about the department's role in the Watergate scandals.

"This doesn't help," said one lawyer.

Other officials took a less pessimistic stance when they spoke of Mr. Saxbe.

"Everybody likes a good press and all institutions gain an extra dose of vigor when they feel they are understood and respected," the head of another division said. But he added that "the department has a momentum of its own" and could continue to function well on a day-to-day basis regardless of the controversy.

Officials Voice Hope

A number of officials also said that they hoped for what one called "a leveling out process," in which Mr. Saxbe would become used to his job and realize that the Attorney General's office required certain restraints that Mr. Saxbe did not need to feel in his earlier role as Senator from Ohio.

"Senators aren't accountable," one department official said.

The press is partly to blame, another official suggested, for it gave good coverage to the blunt statements Mr. Saxbe made in his days as a Senator.

Mr. Saxbe's Wednesday morning sessions with reporters started out as small informal meetings. According to Mr. Hushen, they were designed as a way in which "a closed department was going to get a little ventilation."