

Santarelli Quits and Attributes Action to 'Misleading Reports'

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WASHINGTON, June 4—President Nixon accepted today the resignation of Donald E. Santarelli, who said he was quitting as head of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration because of "misleading reports" about his comments on the President.

In recent days, Mr. Santarelli was quoted in several news reports as saying that the Watergate disclosures had cheapened government service and that Mr. Nixon should resign.

In his letter of resignation to Mr. Nixon, however, the 36-year-old lawyer told the President: "Let me assure you of my continued public and personal support. The report I even suggested your resignation is one of those contextual contortions that give words different meaning than was intended."

He said he was resigning his \$40,000-a-year post because the "misleading reports" had compromised his "ability to continue to serve as a credible and effective administrator of L.E.A.A."

Mr. Santarelli became head of the agency in April, 1973, after previous experience as an Associate Deputy Attorney General and as special counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The agency was created by Congress in 1968 as an arm of the Justice Department to pass out Federal assistance to the local police, courts and jails.

In response to inquiries, a number of knowledgeable Justice Department sources and other law enforcement officials said they were puzzled by the events leading to Mr. Santarelli's resignation.

About three weeks ago, at a private meeting of big city police chiefs in San Francisco

on May 15, Mr. Santarelli reportedly told the police officials that he would not be around much longer.

This comment came after the police chiefs had expressed their strong resentment about an L.E.A.A. survey that found a great deal more crime in 13 specific cities than were being reported by the police.

One official, who asked not to be identified, said that Mr. Santarelli had never wanted the job of heading the agency. This official said that about two months ago Mr. Santarelli started a strong lobbying effort to win a White House nomination to the Federal Communications Commission and had been deeply disappointed when he was not selected.

A Justice Department official, who also asked not to be quoted by name, said that Mr. Santarelli had not informed Attorney General William B. Saxbe of his decision to send his letter of resignation to the White House. This was considered somewhat unusual because the law agency is a branch of the Justice Department.

In his letter accepting Mr. Santarelli's resignation, Mr. Nixon praised the official and said he had "installed a new sense of enthusiasm and purpose in improving all segments of the criminal justice system." Mr. Nixon told Mr. Santarelli, "Your own insights which you have brought to bear have added immeasurably to these results."

In addition to being remembered for his year as administrator of the L.E.A.A., Mr. Santarelli is remembered as one of the principal drafters of the District of Columbia crime bill that authorized the holding without bail—preventive detention—of persons arrested for certain specific crimes.