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Saxbe: Nixon Aides Tried to Interfere

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Attorney General William B. Saxbe disclosed yesterday that the White House tried to pressure him a year ago to interfere with the Watergate investigation by Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

In an interview, Saxbe credited his resistance to that pressure with quickly restoring morale at the Justice Department, which had been wracked by the Watergate scandal.

"There were all kinds of suggestions that we interfere with Jaworski, that we do this and we do that," Saxbe said. "They came pretty thick and fast at first."

But, Saxbe said, "We were able to dodge those bullets." He said he told President Nixon's aides, "no way"—despite their "implied" threat that Saxbe's job might be at stake.

Saxbe, who is leaving the department to be ambassador to India, said the pressure attempts tapered off about two months after his Jan. 4 swearing in. He succeeded Elliot L. Richardson, who had quit the previous October because Nixon fired Jaworski's predecessor, Archibald Cox.

Saxbe said department officials knew what was occurring and would have felt themselves further discredited if he had allowed political pressure to dictate their decisions.

As it was, Saxbe said, Jaworski was able to complete his Watergate investigations without outside interference.

Jaworski, interviewed in a

telephone call to his law office in Houston, said he had been totally unaware of White House pressure on Saxbe. He confirmed that Saxbe had cooperated with him and never interfered.

Saxbe said that if any of the attempted pressures had amounted to moves to obstruct justice, he would have prosecuted immediately.