

Saxbe Pledges Authority Over FBI

By Richard L. Lyons

Washington Post Staff Writer

Attorney General William B. Saxbe said yesterday that he and his successors must assert their authority over the FBI to prevent repetition of its secret counterintelligence activities against noncriminal groups from 1956 to 1971.

Asked on NBC's televised "Meet the Press" (WRC) about a department report describing the FBI "cointelpro," Saxbe said the bureau is not now conducting any such programs. "It won't happen again while I'm here," he said.

Saxbe refused to discuss details of the report because it is not scheduled to be released until today, although portions of it have been published in The Washington Post and other publications.

The Justice Department and FBI officials who prepared the

report called some of the actions by the FBI "abhorrent to a free society." These included sending false and anonymous letters to discredit members of target groups and telling employers or credit bureaus of a person's membership in a target group to hurt the person economically.

Saxbe said it appeared that J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI until his death in 1972, had never made direct reports to any attorney general, his nominal superior, about these programs. Saxbe noted that Hoover had an "unusual" relationship with presidents and Congress and didn't speak to attorneys gen-

eral. Asked if there was no Justice Department control over the FBI, Saxbe replied: "There is today. I can't say about the past."

Saxbe said it is "essential" for attorneys general to

"assert authority over the FBI because this could happen again if we are not vigilant."

On civil rights, Saxbe said he will recommend that parts of the 1965 voting rights act that expire next year be extended. "We think it has worked rather well."

The law, which has been responsible for registering blacks to vote all over the South, has often been called the most effective civil rights act of those enacted during the 1960s. When key parts of the 1965 law, expired in 1970, then Attorney General John N. Mitchell tried to make changes that civil rights leaders said would have gutted the law.

Asked his view of the future of the Republican Party, Saxbe, a former Ohio senator, refused comment on grounds that the Justice Department should be kept out of politics.

"If Watergate taught us anything, it should be that," he said.

Mitchell, who served first as President Nixon's campaign manager, then as Attorney General and then again as campaign manager, is a defendant in the Watergate cover-up trial.