

Interview with

THE HONORABLE WILLIAM D. SAXBY

by

LAWRENCE LEAMER

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The Attorney General answered questions on the following topics:

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MR. LEAMER: And I wondered what this [unintelligible] was doing concerning the [unintelligible]. And I know when you go over to India the kind of reception you will have because of that, because of the kind of memory of that.

And the second reason I know you is because I worked--done some work for Maurice Rosenblatt of the National Committee for an Effective Congress. In fact, I was at your swearing in last year.

MR. SAXBE: Maurice is a good friend of mine. I don't get to see him much any more.

MR. LEAMER: Well, from the way you seem to be partying these last few weeks, with these goings-away, you must not be spending much time at home either. I mean, actually it seems to be one or the other.

MR. SAXBE: Yes. In a way it's nice that I have so many friends, but it's rather tiring, too.

MR. LEAMER: And getting all these shots and things, huh?

MR. SAXBE: Yeah, done all my physicals, and I was at Bethesda this morning and did that treadmill business yesterday. My goodness, they really--it's like joining the army to join the State Department.

MR. LEAMER: I was over in that part of the world in the Peace Corps, I was in Nepal.

MR. SAXBE: Oh, were you?

MR. LEAMER: So I'm a ---

MR. SAXBE: Were you there in the country or in [Indian city]?

MR. LEAMER: I was way out in the country in the eastern hills.

MR. SAXBE: Oh, were you? Up towards Everest.

MR. LEAMER: Yeah. In fact, I made a 40-day trek up to the Mount Everest base camp.

MR. SAXBE: Oh, did you?

MR. LEAMER: Those were the ---

MR. SAXBE: I've been there.

MR. LEAMER: Really?

MR. SAXBE: Yeah. I went up to that llamasery up there above Hilary's camp.

MR. LEAMER: When I was there, it was before there was--you probably went to that airfield and then ---

MR. SAXBE: Went chopper.

MR. LEAMER: I see.

MR. SAXBE: Landed right there.

MR. LEAMER: I see.

MR. SAXBE: 16,000 feet.

MR. LEAMER: You didn't pay your dues on that one.

MR. SAXBE: No, that's a pretty rough climb.

MR. LEAMER: Uh-huh.

MR. SAXBE: We stopped at one of those outposts where there were CIA people. Picked up some gas--they have some gas there in tanks. That was a romantic period in our country, a thousand CIA people in India and the subcontinent. Or not--I mean the ---

MR. LEAMER: Peace Corps.

MR. SAXBE: Peace Corps.

MR. LEAMER: It sure was. Willie Hunsell (?) was director. It was one of the ---

MR. SAXBE: 500 came in the first batch when Galbraith was there. To Nepal.

MR. LEAMER: I always compare Bowles's memoirs of his time in India, which was the first kind of memoirs of --the first awareness of the Third World that way. And then compare that to Galbraith. That is such an arrogant book, that book has nothing to do with India at all, he had no interest in that country. You just wonder why people would tolerate someone like that. I mean, he was flying in and out of here and ---

MR. SAXBE: I couldn't understand it, because, according to the book, he was sitting at Nehru's right hand and telling Nehru what to do, which wasn't true, and complained bitterly about the food, about the climate, about everything. He was and is a very arrogant man.

MR. LEAMER: But I think it is a country you either--you either go one way or the other. You either accept the values of it and like it, or you just hate it so much. You don't find any people in the middle on it, it's just that kind of a place.

MR. SAXBE: Well, Bowles went too far the other way.

MR. LEAMER: Yeah, that's true.

MR. SAXBE: He went native, went around barefoot, he rode a bicycle.

MR. LEAMER: Again, it was a different period of our history maybe and perhaps it didn't seem so absurd, there was that romance of what the Peace Corps could do and what AID could do and all these things that are gone.

MR. SAXBE: You know, that we had been so successful with the Marshall Plan that we thought it was our doing and not the doings of West Germany or France. We laid our hand on and all at once everything took off, and we thought

this formula worked any place in the world. So we went out to India and we applied a beneficence--and then we resented it when it didn't work. It was absorbed into the culture and disappeared like glass fire snow.

I met, a couple of weeks ago, with over a hundred representatives of Ohio state that had spent time in India at the time they were starting the land-grant type of college. And this was at Udupore, and up at Glutiana.

And we reflected--or they did--upon the romantic concepts that they had that they were going to change Indian agriculture overnight.

Well, some things did work. For instance, Glutiana worked to some extent, but it was in the Punjab, and you had a different group of people, you had Sikhs. And the concept of work there completely struck out in Bihar. And this is what most people don't realize, there is just such a diversity. Bengali and the Punjabi are miles apart and were, as demonstrated when they tried to put East and West Pakistan together.

MR. LEAMER: What I wonder now is if we do have these--we have these famines, and here one hears a lot of simplistic solutions about people eating a little bit less meat here and we would send a little bit more food, that

would solve it. I think of Bangladesh and my experiences there. The end result of that is such a tragedy, that government now is more corrupt than it was under the Pakistanis--a terrible thing. And food that is given to them-- I have a friend that just got back from there, and he says at the time of the last Arab-Israeli war that he was working with a relief organization, they had just given a complete portable to them and they shipped it over. And as soon as Sheikh Mujib got it, he called the people into the stadium there and sent it to the Arabs, who could have cared less about Bangladesh, but he just wanted recognition from them for the Pakistanis.

But you just wonder in that kind of situation what can be done. It doesn't help just to be guilty about it over here and to try to blame it on ourselves--it doesn't have that much to do with us.

MR. SAXBE: I don't think that we can reform their culture. I don't think that it is our job. They are a country with almost a sixth of the world's population--and it doesn't behove us to go over and shake our finger at them. And this is what we have been trying to do. They are a great power and I think it is up to them to behave like a great power.

Now, this is going to make strained relations. We

have gone through this fiction of 480 and selling on long-term loans. Well, you and I and everybody knows that there is no way these loans can ever be repaid.

MR. LEAMER: Sure.

MR. SAXBE: I think if we are going to have relief over there, we should do it this way. And if the rats eat it and the people steal it, that is their business. It is not ours to go over there and say, now, you have got to clean up this port or we are not going to give you this grain, or that you have got to see that this doesn't wind up in the black market, because this is very patronizing.

MR. LEAMER: Sure.

MR. SAXBE: And we wouldn't think of doing this to Great Britain or to any of the western nations. I certainly hope that we will treat them with the dignity and respect that they deserve as a country.

MR. LEAMER: When those hard decisions have to be made as to where those foods are going to go, what kind of criteria does one use, then?

MR. SAXBE: Well, right now, it is working in India surprisingly well with the present relief agencies, and I am talking about Title II. They do get this distributed. And approximately 75 percent, which is about the most

you could hope for, gets to needy people. This is Catholic Relief—you are familiar with them--CARE, Protestant Relief, Lutheran, these agencies are recognized in India and accepted. And I think that we have to work through them. I'm talking about the gifts, charitable contribution in grain. We are going to be limited on what we can do and they are not going to like this. That is why it is not going to be an easy tour.

Again, they are a mature country and they have got to behave like that.

MR. LEAMER: What does your religious beliefs have to do with your career--not going over to India, but in this city and in the way you are active in this movement. I wonder just in general your ---

MR. SAXBE: Well, I certainly have a strong belief. And I believe we are put here for a purpose and that the Lord works in mysterious ways. And I personally think that perhaps my going to India may accomplish some purpose that is unforeseen. All I can do is do my best to live up to it. But I am not a Bible-thumper, by any means, and I certainly don't intend to go over there and Christianize India. Their culture and everything goes back--and they have such a variety of religions there.

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MR. LEAMER: How about in this city--the kind of thing that Senator Hughes is trying to do now and the religious members of ---

MR. SAXBE: Well, I am not just sure what he is trying to do. I am not a member of that organization.

MR. LEAMER: When you were sworn in that day, you

MR. SAXBE: Oh, yes. He and I had been friends in the Senate for a long time. And he is very moral, very conscientious, and I respect him for it. Some of his efforts I don't understand, he is almost Pentecostal, some of his beliefs. I am not.

But I think he tries to live as Christian as he sees a Christian should live in dealing with his fellow man. And I just don't think there is enough of this.

MR. LEAMER: Do you think there is a lot of hypocrisy in the way religion is used by politicians?

MR. SAXBE: Always has been, yes. We have people that go to all the public prayer meetings and come to none of the private ones.

I was raised in a small town where you can measure the participation of everybody's religious effort, back in the days when everybody had to belong to a church and attend

--and if someone didn't, it was, you know, talked about.

And so I don't think there is any difference in Washington. The hypocrisy is in any other place.

Now it is no longer necessary, you don't have to have it unless you want to, but it is still greatly used.

MR. LEAMER: Well, but isn't this difference here --that people do kind of, they kind of wrap that around themselves for political purposes in a way that ---

MR. SAXBE: Yes, I have observed that.

MR. LEAMER: I mean, I think ---

MR. SAXBE: I have never tried to do that. I think it is a very private affair. I remember I made one political speech where I--this was many years ago--where I tried to bring religion into it. And it just doesn't fit. I never made that mistake again. That is, by actively participating that we could run our affairs better and if we accepted Christ and this kind of business--it didn't work.

So I don't do it and I never have.

MR. LEAMER: I was struck by the way President Ford in some of his early speeches did use religion. For example, in the amnesty speech. He said, I don't believe in this, I believe those people have done wrong and, you know, most people did serve as they are supposed to, but there is a god

who sees this in a different way.

And then again with the pardoning of President Nixon.

And I notice in the recent speeches he hasn't done this so much. And some people have suggested that they have decided that they--that was somewhat inappropriate to them.

MR. SAXBE: I have never been to any meetings where he has attended any religious meeting.

MR. LEAMER: Do you think this Administration has a more religious tone than other--people that are supposed to be close to the President are known to be more deeply involved with religion than in previous Administrations, do you think that is fair to say?

MR. SAXBE: No. No, I think it is a personal thing.

MR. LEAMER: It is, and that is where it belongs?

MR. SAXBE: That is where it belongs. I never knew of anybody that was damaged because of it.

MR. LEAMER: Because of ---

MR. SAXBE: Of religious participation and belief. I think it makes better people, certainly more considerate of others, more indulgent, more tolerant, more patient. And I think this is needed. Public religion becomes hypocrisy.

MR. LEAMER: Eventually.

MR. SAXBE: Yes. And I don't know how you can keep it from happening when you get the hangers-on, it is the thing to do, so let's go, boys.

MR. LEAMER: I think that is what Hughes is now-- I just did a piece about him and about religion. That is why I am so curious about your perceptions of it. And he has got quite a battle ahead of him now and I think for just the very reason you have just said, that he is such an extraordinary man that perhaps others ---

MR. SAXBE: I have never gone to the National Prayer Breakfasts, I have never taken part in any of these affairs, because I think it is a personal matter. The President's Prayer Breakfasts and all of these things, people get into them and you never see them at the regular meetings, or very often.

And that is when I came to the conclusion that, what the hell, they are in it for what it is going to do them in their image rather than--so it is a personal thing with me, it is a crutch for me, something that--I sometimes feel that I am a little selfish about it because I don't go out and labor in the vineyard.

But somehow I just don't think it is appropriate.

MR. LEAMER: What about your sort of career in Washington? You are one of the great survivors of this city in that you have managed to--I mean, here is this cartoon of the Star-News with you with your foot in your mouth and the kinds of things that you have said, and yet somehow you have managed to more than survive the whole thing, you have managed to transcend it. And I wonder, has that sort of gift of candor or that problem of candor-- have you sometimes wished to yourself, dammit, I wish I was more reticent in talking about--so openly.

MR. SAXBE: No. My attitude on that was that if I had kept my mouth shut I would still be practicing law in Mechanicsburg.

[Hiatus in tape.]

MR. LEAMER: --- is not really a liability at all?

MR. SAXBE: Oh, I see all these people with some fancy footwork and most of them are so cautious that they just never get any place. I don't look back with any regrets. It has probably hurt me, but in other ways it has helped me. It probably balances out.

And I have never said anything that I didn't believe was true. If I said something that, you know, I was basically wrong on, that would be something else. It is

what I believe.

MR. LEAMER: The irony is that so often these things that you look at--for example, the Patty Hearst thing, you say, how could he say that? You happen to have been right, you have that satisfaction out of the whole thing.

MR. SAXBE: Well, I don't like to hurt people and I felt badly that I had hurt her mother and father by that, but, after all, this is a cruel world. And there is a great deal of unfairness in it. And, sure, if I was a jailer and had to push the button to electrocute somebody, I sure as hell wouldn't want to be there and I wouldn't want to do it. But if it was my duty, I would do it.

And these are things that you get involved in.

When I said that during the 30's I felt the Jewish intellectual was enamored of communism, I felt that way. The Jews that I knew during the 30's--I was in college and they were my instructors--this was the impression they gave.

MR. LEAMER: Sure. What is it about this city that people grow so far away from that button you are talking about, whatever that button is, in different parts of this city?

MR. SAXBE: It's a national tendency, it's a national tendency. The toughness to solve our problems just isn't present today. And it is getting more remote. And

we are now with a criminal problem in this country--and in the world.

It's no different than the problem that Hammurabi had 3,000 years ago. It is a problem that every government has always had. And there is a tough way and there is an easy way. The tough way works, to some extent--the easy way doesn't work.

But we are so shot in the ass with the idea that our super-intelligence can rationalize any problem and solve it by delicate means, that we don't have the toughness to solve our economic problems, to solve our legal problems.

MR. LEAMER: But don't you think there is more of that toughness outside the city than within the city itself?

MR. SAXBE: Oh, yes. This city is a separate case.

MR. LEAMER: Is it because Washington is just a government city and there aren't other kinds of elements in this city, or ---

MR. SAXBE: A lot of that. The pull and haul of economic necessity doesn't hit Washington. We dabble on the periphery of most of the economic problems of the country. And you get a belief in Santa Claus here that is

unbelievable. You know, there is always a job, there is always somebody you can turn to, there is somebody to hear your story. The representative of the under-accomplished is the most visible person around here.

MR. LEAMER: What about all this kind of deference, that we talk about the imperial presidency, but maybe it is not an imperial Congress--but if for twenty years everybody listens with great interest to every banality that comes out of you, as happens here, what is the end result of that process?

MR. SAXBE: Total confusion. You know, Congress has been clamoring for years that they want a part in the Government, they want a part in the nation's economy and they want a part in foreign affairs and they want a part in law enforcement. They have got the chance now. They have got a weak presidency, weak because there is no [unintelligible] or confused public, and we are going to see, I am afraid, the [unintelligible] floundering for the next year and two years, in Congress that we have ever seen, because this is a town that destroys leadership. It is like the black community. The black community has never been able to support a leader.

MR. LEAMER: Hmm, that is true.

MR. SAXBE: As soon as someone emerges that is capable of providing leadership and direction, they all jump on him and cut him to pieces.

And this town has somewhat the same attitude. They are afraid of power, they are afraid of brilliance. And anybody that emerges has to be chopped up.

MR. LEAMER: And I think that freshman class in Congress is just the perfect example of that, that it is fun what they are doing now, but when they had to choose a president of their class they couldn't do it--they had about ninety hands go up, you know.

MR. SAXBE: Well, you can take a great big ball and knock a building down in a couple of days, and you don't have to have any particular skill. Somebody wrote a poem about that--with a yo-heave-ho [unintelligible].

MR. LEAMER: What strikes me about them is that there is not--one fellow from Colorado, one fellow from Texas and one New Yorker. They are all fairly interchangeable, they are this kind of professional politician that we have created. And they are very smart and they are going to be here for years and years.

MR. SAXBE: Consumer-oriented ---

MR. LEAMER: Right.

MR. SAXBE: Emotional appeal type.

MR. LEAMER: Right.

MR. SAXBE: They look at the Proxmires and the Aspins who get their name in the paper by--turned over rocks. But when you look at the constructive legislation that a Proxmire has put through or an Aspin, why, they are not builders, they are wreckers.

And you have to have an attitude that unless you can improve on something, you better leave it alone.

MR. LEAMER: Uh-huh.

MR. SAXBE: But we are on this national kick right now.

MR. LEAMER: Just knocking.

MR. SAXBE: Whether it's pollution, whether it's drugs, whether it's strip-mining, whether it's government.

MR. LEAMER: Isn't one of the ironies of Watergate that--it is the dangers of centralized government, of that centralized a government, and now with the economic problems, we are going to have even a more centralized government?

MR. SAXBE: Oh, sure. And this is not only true from that, but it is also true because the problems at the municipal level particularly, and at the state level, are getting so tremendous that they are all forwarded for solution to Washington. Washington doesn't take the power away,

it receives it when it is bestowed on it, in many cases.

MR. LEAMER: Well, it is interesting that President Ford ---

MR. SAXBE: But you know there is a limit to what government can do also. Once you reach the point where you are running everything, as in a totalitarian government, it becomes very inefficient, because nobody will assume any responsibility. You know, if you assume no responsibility, you make no mistake.

And if the cost of making a mistake, however slight, is so great, that your career is wrecked, you are going to find only those who survive or ones who make no mistake, because they don't do anything.

If you just make all the formations and sign the payroll and do what your MOS or other specialty requires you to do, you are assured of a job, because you can't be kicked out. And you make no mistakes.

And I use to say that there's lots of ways that you can play politics. You can play it cozy, and you can play it cozy and survive. I have always said about politicians, you always have an opportunity to cash in--I don't mean anything illegal, but you can quit and you can go into private business, you can go into a law practice, you can do

all of these things, at whichever time that you want to. You make a name for yourself and then you go out and you merchandise it.

And many politicians do this. Some make the mistake of trying to do it while they are in office--and they can't. I have put mine off--I decided I would rather be involved in politics than be a wealthy man. I have never regretted it. But I have also never been one that played it cozy. I have taken a risk.

But when the risk is no longer rewarded, fewer people are going to take it--or is rewarded only by catching hell.

MR. LEAMER: But I think what is happening now, you have got a breed of politician who has captured kind of the veneer of candor. I mean, they pretend to this great candor--and it is not that at all.

MR. SAXBE: The electorate couldn't have more non-government if it had planned than they have today. They have effectively destroyed old alliances and there is nothing to emerge. It would almost appear as though they are so fed up with government that ---

MR. LEAMER: By definition.

MR. SAXBE: They want to destroy it by undermining

all of the solid points.

MR. LEAMER: One thing that surprised me about President Ford's state-of-the-union message was that he was so--he exaggerated the problems. He exaggerated the crisis, it seemed to me. Now, somebody suggested that was the only thing he could do to get the Congress to do its--someone was quoting something that Dirksen said about Congress. But the point was, you had to treat them that way--if you dealt with them as you would just talking to somebody man to man, you wouldn't get them to do anything. You have to kind of set up this kind of rhetoric.

MR. SAXBE: You have got to hit them with a 2 by 4 to get their attention.

MR. LEAMER: Right.

MR. SAXBE: Well, that may be true, but we like to wallow in our misery. This is one of the luxuries of politics. And we have presently this disaster sheet group, you know, that sit around and see no good in anything. It's like *Il Penseroso*--do you remember Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*? In *L'Allegro* everything was bright--hasty nymphs and all this? And then everything in *Il Penseroso* was very discouraging.

Well, we are right in the midst of another

Pensoroso here.

MR. LEAMER: Well, one thing that I think may tend to make some people negative is, talk about your prisoner, say, a robber who is coming out after ten years, he serves his sentence. He gets out--and if he got out yesterday and turned on television at 12:30, as I did, and watched Jeb Stuart Magruder, after his seven months in prison, talking about his book, talking about--he is going to go out on the lecture circuit now and talk about how terrible life in prison is--and he has served in one of the easiest prisons in America--what can you make of this? What can you make of John Dean now, making a fortune out of--he and his wife both making a fortune out of their books? What does that really have to say about our society--to those who would buy the book, to the publishers who will give them that kind of money, to those of us in the media who run to them?

MR. SAXBE: Well, what can you say about a society that pays a football player \$250,000 and begrudges \$10,000 to a policeman? Or less.

But I tend to be optimistic about this country. We have toughed out a lot of difficult periods. I think we are muddled and mixed up right now. But I think that leadership will emerge, I think we will get back on the track. I am not

ready to sign off.

MR. LEAMER: Well, I still just wish that this city had one half of the kind of vitality that the people in the nation have. When you get out of this place, you see such a difference really.

MR. SAXBE: I used to say when you get up in the morning and read The Washington Post, you want to go back to bed. And if you read both the Post and the Times, you do go back to bed, because they dwell on the infirmities of man.

Now, it may be that no other news is worthwhile, but, you know, you read about the infirmities of man all the time and you get the impression that he is a total [unintelligible].

Is there anything else?

MR. LEAMER: Just one last question about your sort of social life in Washington. Well, the Style section of the Post, you have to admit that that is at least a positive section of the Post--and General Saxbe is in there with great frequency at these social gatherings. I wouldn't have thought of you as being ---

MR. SAXBE: It's because I have an attractive, interesting wife.

MR. LEAMER: Does she drag you to these things?

MR. SAXBE: No, no, I am a very social animal. I like people and we have met some wonderful people here. What I like about Washington society is that they are interesting, they are clever, the talk is challenging.

MR. LEAMER: You do have that feeling about it?

MR. SAXBE: Yes. And we don't go to many big affairs, but we thoroughly enjoy the private small dinner parties. We don't like cocktail parties, so we don't go to those. But the small intimate dinner party and the thing like that, we like. And that is where we have done most of our socializing.

MR. LEAMER: How about your wife now, leaving--is she excited about going?

MR. SAXBE: Yes, she loves India. She thinks it is just as much of a challenge as I do. And she will be a great help over there, too.

MR. LEAMER: Well, I envy you that assignment.

MR. SAXBE: In many ways it is going to be enviable, in other ways--some times I get rather discouraged as I go the rounds and hear of our present state.

MR. LEAMER: Well, we need [tapes ends here].