

Attorney General William Saxbe
Interview with Mel Martin, WTOL-TV, Toledo, Ohio
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Q: Mr. Saxbe, you commented that Watergate is among the worst of political scandals that we've had. Do you think it's in some ways crippling the government? Do you think there's too much attention being paid by the news media and are the people interested in it?

Saxbe: Well, the answer's no to both. I don't think it's crippling the government. It's certainly having an affect on foreign affairs, I'm sure. But as to the ability of the Justice Department to carry on, no. It's not, it's not deterring our work and as to the whether there's too much coverage, no, I don't think so. I think the coverage will reflect what the people want. If people get tired of it, the coverage will drop off. I hope they don't get tired of it because I think that in this way we can be sure such things don't happen again.

Q: What do you think was the lesson to be learned? What would you like to say to American business, for example, which has been quite . . .

Saxbe: That's what I'm talking about in here today, to talk about the responsibilities of American business. You know, all crime is not muggings, on-the-street crimes. Crime involves white-collar crime, too. And the price-fixing, and the shaving on products and product safety, all of these are the responsibility of business. And I'm talking about how it affects business and how that affects people and if we want the free enterprise system to continue it must remain just exactly that. It must remain free . . .

Q: Much attention has been focused on Watergate and I suppose most of the media attention as well. What are the priorities now for the Justice Department now that you are heading it in a non-Watergate way?

Saxbe: The Justice Department has always had a tremendous responsibility in the areas of anti-trust. We enforce all of the Federal statutes and the FBI, of course, investigates those. Besides that, we run all of the prisons in the country, and that's a big job because we have a big prison population.

Q: Do you expect that because of the Watergate thing that there is going to be an overreaction. I've heard many politicians say that now there's going to be too much searching into someone's past and that there may be a first amendment thing. Are we going to really have a generation of some of the cleanest elections and politicians we have ever had?

Saxbe: I think the tendency is to overreact, but at the same time this is a way of democracy cleanses itself. If we didn't have the opportunity to do this periodically, we'd have to have a revolution or something similar, that is like they have in countries where the rigidity of control is so strong that the only way that you can liberate yourself from undesirable activities is to overthrow the government. And I think this shows flexibility of our democracy and our Constitution. And I think that this is good because it's our safety valve.

Q: A lot of people have expressed discontent in that the Watergate has taken so long to resolve. How long is it going to be with us, do you think before it's finally all over?

Saxbe: Of course, this is always a complaint about the processes of law, but it takes a long time because it must be very thorough. With haste, I think that you would run the risk of violating people's constitutional rights. I think right now, we have to be very careful because of the enthusiasm.