

BILL RUCKELSHAUS

The Conscience of “Mr. Clean”



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who ARE we?

Washington's Kaleidoscope

Air Force One cruised over the flood-ravaged Mississippi Valley in the spring of 1973. Richard M. Nixon, whose presidency was unraveling, had an aide place a call to 40-year-old William Ruckelshaus, tending his rose bushes in suburban Maryland.

Millions knew Ruckelshaus. He'd risen to national prominence as Nixon's new environmental cop. Sludge clogged rivers and smog shrouded city skylines. As a pollution fighter, Ruckelshaus took on the automakers and banned DDT, the widely used toxic pesticide. "Mr. Clean" seemed unfazed and steady in the crossfire. "This guy is a fifth-generation Hoosier and he's from the Midwest," says Philip Angell, a former colleague. "He has an incredibly deep taproot into the good values that we all honor in this country."

In 1973, most Americans could still remember the "old" Nixon, the anti-Communist crusader who became Eisenhower's controversial running mate and lost the presidency to John



It didn't take the new EPA chief long to realize "the simple truth that as a society we know very little about what we are doing to ourselves."
December 1970. *Associated Press/Charles Tasnadi*

F. Kennedy in a photo finish. A “new” Nixon—smiling, kissing babies—emerged from the chaos of 1968. Behind his well-crafted image, Nixon remained what he’d been since a humble childhood, “shy, lonely, much-wounded, ambitious.” His worst enemies conceded he was extremely bright; his most trusted confidantes saw his awkward insecurities that would morph into paranoia.

Nixon met Ruckelshaus in Indiana during the 1968 campaign and posed with the tall Hoosier for a poster. Ruckelshaus lost a tough race for the U.S. Senate to a popular incumbent, but Nixon at long last had won the presidency. Four years later, he crushed Sen. George McGovern, the anti-war Democrat, in a 49-state landslide. Yet within months of his sweeping triumph, the president slipped.



Now Ruckelshaus was being summoned to the White House. No one on board *Air Force One* revealed why the president wanted to see him. Ruckelshaus abandoned his garden and directed his driver to the Oval Office as another key figure in the administration cleaned out his desk. The FBI had linked a 1972 burglary at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate to the White House.

L. Patrick Gray III, acting director of the FBI, had to go. Gray admitted to destroying sensitive papers once held in the safe of E. Howard Hunt, a White House “plumber” and a former CIA operative who orchestrated the burglary. Told the papers were “political dynamite” that should never “see the light of day,” Gray burned them with the Christmas trash in the fireplace of his Connecticut home. “I depart from the FBI with a clear conscience,” he said, “and the knowledge that I have

done my duty as best as I have been able to see that duty.”

Ruckelshaus arrived just before 4 p.m., the appointed hour, and found the president worn and agitated. He had always found Nixon uneasy with people and socially awkward. On the campaign trail, he'd shake just enough hands to get by. He'd abruptly end conversations by pulling a presidential golf ball from his desk and handing it to the visitor. “Guess where I was today?” Ruckelshaus would say to his wife, waving his new memento. But this day was different. On April 27, 1973, Ruckelshaus worried about the stability of the beleaguered president, a man he wanted to admire. More telling, the two men were alone in the Oval House for the first time ever—without H. R. “Bob” Haldeman, the intense crew-cut chief of staff, who was always taking notes.

“Ruck, how are you?” the president asked.

“Fine, Mr. President.”



Ruckelshaus wanted to admire Nixon. “You owe him a debt of loyalty. It doesn’t transcend everything, but it’s a very important duty.” *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

“Come in. Nice to see you. Sorry to call you on such short notice.” Nixon praised Ruckelshaus for walking a tightrope with the auto industry and quickly steered the conversation to the resigning FBI chief. “Gray is a wonderful guy, as you know,” the president said, but destroying the documents was “utterly stupid” and left the country in a “crisis of the highest importance.”

“I want you to understand that that’s the purpose of my calling you here,” Nixon

continued. After weighing the FBI vacancy, the president told Ruckelshaus he considered him the ideal choice for a new permanent director. "I've thought of everyone I know who's qualified. You're Mr. Clean. You're absolutely incorruptible. Everybody has trusted you."

"If you would give me an answer now," Nixon pressed. "Would you take it? Would you take the director of the Bureau?"

Ruckelshaus, who stood 6'4" and wore black horn-rimmed glasses, came with an impressive resume. He graduated from Princeton University (cum laude) and Harvard Law School. As deputy attorney general in Indiana, he argued several cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. His swift ascent through the Nixon Administration carried him from the Civil Division of the Justice Department to the helm of the newly created Environmental Protection Agency. The pollution chief mopped up daily political brushfires under heavy scrutiny and escaped relatively unscathed. Journalists dubbed him a "high-wire artist" for balancing resistance from industry against a groundswell of activism.

"If you asked me to do it as president, on behalf of the country, my answer would be, 'Of course,'" Ruckelshaus said to the president. "But, I have no desire to be the director of the FBI." Ruckelshaus had no burning ambition to manage the Bureau or to investigate federal crimes. But he offered to take the job until Nixon named a permanent replacement.

President Nixon directed Ruckelshaus to keep the FBI together while he conducted the search. "I want you to get me a personnel analysis," he ordered, admitting he wanted to know about Mark Felt, the hard-nosed deputy director. Nixon warned Ruckelshaus that Felt "leaks like a sieve." Nixon was curious about "all these other people—which ones are good and which are bad, which ones are worn out, which are cutting the others, what the bureaucracy is, what the attitudes are and so forth."

Nixon and Ruckelshaus huddled with aides and prepared to be deluged by journalists. The Ruckelshaus appointment at the Bureau was a big story. Gray had been named acting di-

rector only 11 months earlier. And the FBI was an institution, directed since 1924 by the legendary J. Edgar Hoover, who kept dossiers on all manner of people—politicians, preachers and movie stars—he considered “subversive.” (Hoover’s office “resembled the Taj Mahal,” Ruckelshaus noted, and he’d run the Bureau with an iron fist, but “if you run anything for 45 years you’ve done some things right.”)

There was one more thing: Nixon asked Ruckelshaus, [You’ve] “never had a damn thing to do with Watergate or any of that crap, right?” Ruckelshaus assured him he’d played no role in the scandal. Then he asked the president the same question, noting that in a few minutes, “I’m going to go out in the Blue Room and face this press, which is not exactly a friendly group.”

Ruckelshaus tells what happened next: “He made a *very* convincing statement to me that he was in no way involved in this. He said, ‘You tell them that I told you to get to the bottom of this and leave no stone unturned.’ ” Throughout his 42-minute conversation with the president, Nixon kept repeating the message. If asked about the Watergate investigation, “That’s what I told you. I don’t care who it hurts. Leave no stone unturned over there in that damn bureaucracy.”

It was the last conversation Ruckelshaus ever had with the president.

Nixon took off for Camp David. Ruckelshaus headed for the Blue Room and a group of White House reporters he likened to a “pack of snarling dogs.” The new FBI chief—albeit temporary—promised an “honest, fair and vigorous prosecution of my duties.”

When he heard the news, U.S. Sen. Henry M. Jackson, Washington’s influential Democrat, said of Ruckelshaus, “Everything I know about him indicates that he is a man of good character and integrity, but I think he’s been put at a disadvantage.”

FBI agents coined Ruckelshaus’ first day at the Bureau “blue Monday.” They left a copy of a telegram they’d sent the president on the acting director’s desk. It was signed by 13 assistant directors and all but one of 59 field agents. Ranking

leadership urged the president to hire someone from within as permanent director. They didn't want "a bird watcher as Hoover's successor," Ruckelshaus says. Mark Felt, the Bureau's No. 2 man, later recalled being "jarred by the sight of Ruckelshaus lolling in an easy chair with his feet on what I felt was J. Edgar Hoover's desk." Felt duly informed Ruckelshaus that the telegram had been sent to the White House and the press. He said later that it was never an attempt on his part to claim the directorship. "There was no need to unseat someone who would barely warm the director's chair," Felt wrote.

Agents regarded Ruckelshaus as an impressive administrator, one official said, but any outsider "is going to be Mr. Nixon's man—there's just no other way."

Seismic political shakeups continued unabated at the capital. When Ruckelshaus returned home from his first day at the FBI, Nixon addressed the American people. In a televised speech he said he was "appalled" by the Watergate break-in and "shocked to learn that employees of the Re-Election Committee were apparently among those guilty."



*To William D. Ruckelshaus
With cordial regards
J. Edgar Hoover
2.4.69*

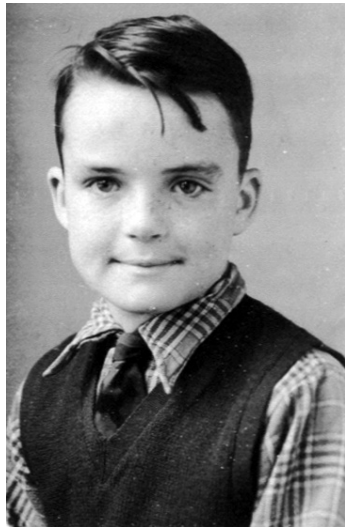
Ruckelshaus, an assistant attorney general, meets J. Edgar Hoover in 1969. Shortly after this photograph is taken, Ruckelshaus returns to his office to find a signed copy on his desk. "I was flabbergasted. You can't take a picture and run it over the Internet. You had to get the thing developed. He had it developed and signed and on my desk by the time I got back." *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

Nixon announced the abrupt departure of four of his closest aides, including Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, the former Seattle lawyer who had been with him since the 1960 campaign. The president had also accepted the resignation of Richard Kleindienst, the U.S. attorney general and his friend of 20 years. But in accepting their resignations the president said, "I mean to leave no implication whatever of personal wrongdoing on their part."

"In my wildest dreams, I never realized he would do something like he was doing during the Watergate," Ruckelshaus says.

KURT VONNEGUT, THE award-winning novelist, once likened Indianapolis, the hometown of William Doyle Ruckelshaus, to a cemetery with lights that breathes one day a year for the Indy 500. Detractors mocked the city as "Indian No Place." Newspapers cast Indianapolis as a "somewhat plain pumpkin." Not Ruckelshaus. The transplanted Washingtonian has never forgotten his roots in America's Heartland—a place famous for family values and basketball. "I'm a native Hoosier and you never lose that," he said.

"Ever seen the movie *Hoo-siers*?" Ruckelshaus asks from the Madrona Venture Group. He's in his office overlooking downtown Seattle with one leg draped over the arm of a leather chair and a tired briefcase next to his desk. Never mind that he has served three American presidents and ranks among Puget Sound's most famous environmentalists. He remains an unpretentious and accessible figure. Ruckelshaus has always remembered what it means to be back home again, in Indiana,



"He was quite a tease when he was younger—had a great sense of humor. But he loved to jab at you if he could," says younger sister Ronnie Bitzer. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

in a gymnasium packed to the rafters. "When I was a child and a high school student that was exactly what basketball in Indiana was all about. These little towns have maybe 3,000 people. The gym seated 5,000 and they'd fill it up every game."

They filled up Butler Fieldhouse in 1954. Fifteen thousand fans roared when Bobby Plump elevated a jump shot at the buzzer to give the Milan High School Indians the state championship. Those immortal 18 seconds known as the "Milan Miracle" inspired a museum, a classic movie and an enduring story of Midwest Basketball Country. "When I was growing up," Ruckelshaus says, "Plump was far more famous than anybody else in Indiana."

Indiana means more to Ruckelshaus than storybook basketball. He comes from a long line of interesting Hoosiers. His grandfather, John C. Ruckelshaus, established the family law firm, one of the most prestigious in Indianapolis history. Everything about John was big. He had a big 6'2" frame, a big personality and "a voice that peeled paint." The former college football player was known to rail at athletes until "they just about blew their stack."

But no one influenced Ruckelshaus like his father. John Kiley Ruckelshaus was Lincoln-esque, with a shock of dark hair and a lean build. In high school, his 6'4" frame made him the tallest basketball player in Indiana. Bill grew to the same height. His dad "wouldn't even be the tallest player on the fourth string today. It's amazing how height has changed. Even when I started playing basketball people who were over 6'7" were called goons," Ruckelshaus chuckles.

His father enrolled in officer's candidate school—though



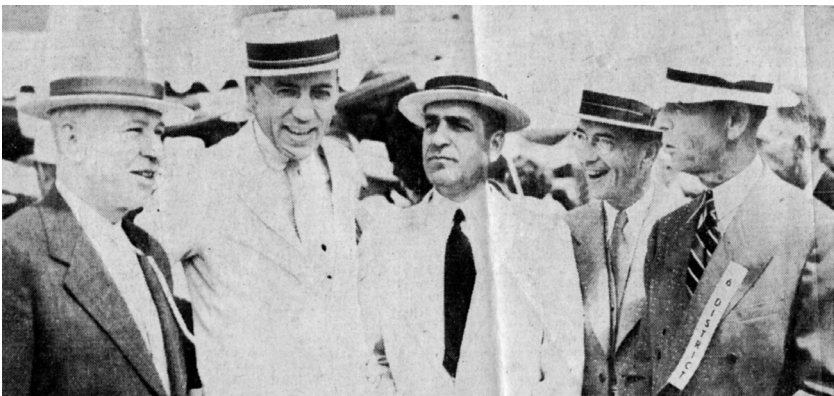
The Ruckelshaus family roots run centuries deep in Indianapolis. In 1895, John C. Ruckelshaus, Bill's grandfather, established one of the most prestigious firms in city history. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

he was too nearsighted for combat in World War I—and went on to graduate from Harvard Law School. He became city attorney of Indianapolis, deputy attorney general and president of the Indianapolis Bar.

Bill's father was a force behind the scenes of Indiana politics. Named an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1932, he declined a U.S. Senate run in 1944. A Roman Catholic, John thought he was unelectable. He also found the party's ties to the Ku Klux Klan appalling. (The *Indianapolis Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing the organization's ties to more than half of the Indiana General Assembly in 1928.) In 1952, John Ruckelshaus was named vice president of the original Eisenhower for President Committee.

For all his party loyalty, the elder Ruckelshaus raised his son to respect public service. At the movies when Bill was a teenager, he saw President Truman on the screen and with the crowd "let out a boo thinking this is where our family is. We don't like this guy. Dad grabbed my arm. He took me out into the lobby and shook me. 'We never boo a President of the United States,' he said. That lesson has never left me," Ruckelshaus recalls with a grin.

John was known all over Indianapolis as someone who lived what he believed. An example of his abiding faith occurred when Bill was in high school. His mother, Marion Doyle, an auburn-haired socialite from Binghamton, New York, suf-



"Dad was a highly admired person in Indianapolis because of his fine character. Everybody knew that about him." *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*



John Ruckelshaus would do anything to keep his son from faltering. But Bill never learned the full extent of his father's influence until after his death in 1962. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

before he would go to work.” In 1959, Pope John XXIII made the elder Ruckelshaus a Knight of St. Gregory, one of the highest honors bestowed upon laymen.

FEW RUCKELSHAUS STORIES top the turn of events he shared with the graduating class of Princeton University in 1984. At the invitation of his alma mater, the recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Award said he was supposed to talk about what a great man he was “and how richly you deserve what you get.” Instead, Ruckelshaus told the audience about the summer of 1953. Holding an abysmal report card, his father had ascended the stairs of their Indianapolis home to reproach him for his downward spiral at Princeton. John was furious. “I’m doing my best,” Bill answered.

His father accepted the excuse with measured reluctance

ferred from complications of a hysterectomy. Bill says his mother never fit the brooding Irish stereotype. “She had this wonderful outlook on life. Somebody would have some terrible accident and she’d say, ‘Aren’t they lucky? They could have been killed!’ ”

When Marion became ill, Bill’s father made a pact with God. If she survived, he’d go to Mass *every day* for the rest of his life. Marion recovered and John became a fixture in the pews. “He went to communion every day,” Bill recalls. “I’m not saying he never missed—there may have been times when he was sick—but he was there every morning be-



Portrait of a prominent Indianapolis family. Marion and John Ruckelshaus pose with their children: Bill, Jack and Ronnie. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

until he received a letter a couple of weeks later documenting Bill's excessive absences. "Tell me again about how hard you're working at school," John demanded. When Ruckelshaus gave his pat answer, his father brandished the letter. It revealed that Bill was teetering on "cut probation."

"While I didn't get my food under the door for the rest of the summer," Ruckelshaus jokes, "it was close." Punishment at home turned out to be the least of his worries.

Days from his scheduled return to Princeton, Bill's mother knocked on the bedroom door waving a draft notice. (The Korean Peninsula had erupted in war three years earlier.)

Disbelief churned in Ruckelshaus until he slipped into fatigues at Fort Knox. He was busy brooding at basic training when a West Point officer confronted him. He was like most all West Point officers, Bill recalls, "prideful of the fact that they were soldiers, that they were officers."

"You can fight this thing the whole time you're in here and you won't get anything out of it," the officer told Ruck-

elshaus. "Or you can apply yourself and see if you can advance in the Army and make something out of it."

On assignment at Fort Lewis in 1954, Ruckelshaus heeded the officer's advice and soon wielded more power than he'd ever imagined. "I moved from private, to private first class, to corporal, to sergeant in about 18 months, which was very unusual. Instead of being a senior at Princeton, I was calling 280 men out of the barracks and drilling them every morning for an hour. I tell some people in jest that was more power than I'd ever had in my life. I would tell 280 men to turn to the right and they'd all turn to the right."

Ruckelshaus never learned the full truth behind his stint in the Army until his father died in the summer of 1962. "Ever wonder how you got drafted?" his mother asked as they sat in the car following the hearse.

"Bad luck?"

"No, your father. He was so worried that you were wast-



"It shook me up plenty," Ruckelshaus says after his father intervened and had him drafted into the U.S. Army. Above at Fort Lewis. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

ing your time at school, he decided you better go in the Army.” As a former head of the draft board, Bill’s father had twisted the arms of old buddies.

“Mother, there was a war going on. I could have been shot!”

“Well, that was a risk we were willing to take.”

“I joke about what Mother said, about being killed,” Ruckelshaus says. “I’m sure that’s not what entered my father’s mind. He just decided I needed some shaking up. He was going to make the decision for me and he wasn’t going to tell me about it. He was absolutely right. It shook me up plenty.”

RUCKELSHAUS LOST HIS FATHER suddenly, during an awful fishing trip in the summer of 1962. They’d pushed off with three other fishermen from Harbor Springs, on the northern end of Lake Michigan. It bends there like the tip of a finger. The weather forecasters were calling for scattered thundershowers, partly cloudy skies and a high of 79. But even on calm days at the tail end of August, squalls can overturn a sturdy boat.

The men were headed to the Beaver Island archipelago, a chain of islands near the scene of a 1958 shipwreck. Mammoth waves and swirling winds tore the *S.S. Carl D. Bradley* in two that winter. And a vessel the size of two football fields was swallowed by a lake. Six thousand ships have wrecked in these inland seas, with 30,000 casualties. “These are called Great Lakes for a reason,” warned a native. This was nothing new to Ruckelshaus or his father. They were seasoned fishermen who returned to nearby Burt Lake every summer.

The five men climbed into a twin-engine cabin cruiser. The fish didn’t bite until they reached Hog Island, one of the most undisturbed islands in the archipelago. They anchored their cruiser and boarded a dinghy for a nearby spit of land surrounded by drop-offs and boulders the size of small cars. When they put their hooks in the water, all of a sudden “good solid bass—two to four pounds—hit just about anything you threw at them,” says Ed Clark, then 23. “I’ve heard of fish biting like that before a storm, going into a feeding frenzy. We were so mesmerized, we didn’t notice the ugly gray line of squalls forming behind us.”

The U.S. Coast Guard issued a small craft warning. The five men would make two trips back to the cruiser. Ed Clark, John Ruckelshaus and Floyd Potts, the skipper, hopped aboard the dinghy first. During their quarter-mile trek back to the cruiser, the waves grew higher. Two at first—then a third that forced Clark overboard and swamped the small boat. Clark witnessed the loss of Potts and later wrote: "I can still see his face, a small man just sinking in the clear water, not struggling or thrashing around."

John Ruckelshaus struggled about a mile from shore. Clark tossed him an oar, but it fell short. Bill watched helplessly from the shore. His hard-fought rescue attempt was futile in the breaking waves and storm. "It was terrible," Ruckelshaus says. "I couldn't get to him. The wind and the rain were such—it wasn't possible. As they tipped over, Dad still had his waders on. He didn't have a life preserver and the guide didn't supply it. He couldn't stay afloat. He went under and so did the guide. And the younger man was able to swim back to shore."

Clark collapsed in a heap on dry land. The three men slept fitfully and used a battered cabin door to stave off the wind. "We would change positions," Ruckelshaus said. "One would get in the middle and two on the outside. It was kind of like the penguins down in Antarctica—they keep changing around so that the person in the middle stays warmer. We were doing the same thing."

An overnight search triggered by a call from the skipper's wife turned up no sign of the missing men. In the family cottage on Burt Lake, tree branches whacked the windows and Bill's sister, Ronnie, stared at the clock. "I remember having this sort of dread," she said. "You wonder, 'Why aren't they home?'"

A Coast Guard plane spotted the three survivors at first light. "We were distraught," Bill said. "You know, I've thought about it since. [Dad] was in his early sixties. And I was in my thirties. And my impression then was that well, he'd lived a full life. I've since decided, no, he didn't. He had 20 years left probably—it was a terrible thing. I missed him. I used to talk to him about all kinds of things. Dad was a highly admired

person in Indianapolis because of his fine character. Everybody knew that about him.”

It was a time of great heartbreak. Little more than a year earlier, Bill lost his first wife. An infection overtook Ellen’s body days after she delivered twin girls in 1961. Ruckelshaus’ handling of both tragedies won the admiration of his family and his friends. “He has an incredible spirit, very optimistic and positive,” his daughter Cathy said. “And it’s not in a denial kind of a way. I just think he has that ability.”

“He just recognized fate and moved on,” said Jack Ruckelshaus, Bill’s late brother. “He was very strong. I mean, a lot of people it would break—they’d either go to booze or drugs or say, ‘I don’t give a damn.’ and give up. That wasn’t him at all.”

“Bill is really a family man,” says Gerald Hansler, a long-time friend. “I knew him when his first wife was killed. And he weathered that. Here I saw a guy who had a constitution and a mind that was caring, but he could also take a punch. He could take a punch.”

IN 1968, CANDIDATE RUCKELSHAUS launched a campaign for the U.S. Senate. His opponent was the incumbent, Birch Bayh, a brown-haired, blue-eyed dirt farmer with a flair for politics. The hard-charging Democrat made headlines in 1964 for rescuing Ted Kennedy from a crashed plane. Ruckelshaus was



Birch Bayh, an Indiana dirt farmer with a flair for politics, defeated Ruckelshaus in 1968. *U.S. Congress*

a political rising star—freshman majority leader in the General Assembly in 1966 and the youngest U.S. Senate candidate ever nominated by Indiana Republicans.

Mitch Daniels, who would become the 49th governor of Indiana, broke into politics on the Ruckelshaus campaign. “We thought we were big stuff. You didn’t have to

be around Bill much to become quickly devoted to him," Daniels says. "We were all convinced that if he could win, he would have been instantly a great senator."

The battle plan counted on Richard Nixon's coattails. It was shaping up as a Republican year and Ruckelshaus hoped to get a sizable lift from the GOP's standard bearer. Sounding a "law and order" theme, Nixon was on a roll, resurrecting his political career after two stinging defeats, the last a humiliating loss in his bid for governor of California.

But Bill's last name alone posed an obstacle. People could hardly pronounce Ruckelshaus, let alone remember it on a ballot. The campaign rolled out a billboard ad—*Big Men with Big Names*. It included other big men with big names—like Ara Parseghian, the famous Notre Dame football coach. Parseghian objected to his involvement and "Ruckelshaus solemnly retorted that he had had no objections from the others—Washington, Shakespeare, Hippocrates, or Shostakovich." This was a minor glitch compared to taking on a proven incumbent. Bayh had defeated a three-term senator in 1962, whistling his way to victory with the catchy jingle: "Hey, look him over. He's your kind of guy. His first name is Birch. His last name is Bayh." (The Ruckelshaus campaign purchased the rights to the jingle in 1968.)



A leading pollster declared early on that Ruckelshaus was a long shot, reportedly behind 63 to 13 in a poll of likely voters. The pollster, a friend of Bill's, advised him to get out. "I've already announced; I can't very well quit," Ruckelshaus replied.

The grueling campaign schedule found Ruckelshaus out of bed and up and at'em well before his wife and his five young children. He'd devour a book on foreign policy, scan articles from 13 magazines or study one of 75 issues researched by his brain trust. The candidate traveled by twin-engine private plane, by helicopter or by station wagon, twisting his big frame into the front seat and loosening his tie. Ruckelshaus



“America is fighting three wars,” Ruckelshaus declared in this 1968 campaign ad. “The war in Vietnam, the war on crime, and the war on inflation.”
The Terre Haute Tribune

averaged a dozen daily speeches over a 16-hour work day. During a reprieve one Sunday morning, his 4-year-old son, Billy, appeared at his bedside and demanded a cookie. When Ruckelshaus grumbled it was too early, Billy “stuck out his chin, pulled my campaign button off his pajamas and announced, ‘I’m voting for Birch Bayh.’ ”

The number of violent crimes had more than tripled in Indiana from 1960 to 1968. Despite Bayh’s seat on the Judiciary Committee, Ruckelshaus told Indiana voters, he had done nothing to solve the nation’s crime woes. “What is needed is national leadership that will say to the American people, ‘each individual must be held responsible for his own actions.’ This principle of individual responsibility is at the foundation of our criminal laws and of a free society.”

On September 12, 1968, Bill introduced Nixon to 22,000 Hoosiers at Monument Circle, observing the defining history unfolding around them. College campuses were erupting in anti-war protests. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and Robert Kennedy proclaimed in an Indianapolis ghetto, “What we need in the United States is not hatred.” Within months he was murdered, too.

“Not since Lincoln’s time has our country seen such crises,” Ruckelshaus told hometown voters. The Republican

presidential nominee said, “I speak for the new voice—the forgotten Americans—good people who send their children to school, go to church and obey the law.”

Political writer Lou Cannon remembered that pollster Bob Teeter “always thought Ruckelshaus would have beaten Birch Bayh, except that Ruckelshaus was amused by what would have outraged other politicians ... Birch was very much against gun control in southern Indiana and was more for it in the cities, and Ruckelshaus would start laughing when he’d tell a different position instead of driving a point home.” Bayh’s mixed messages eventually frustrated Ruckelshaus and made their way into *The Washington Post*. “Ruckelshaus complains that whenever he tries to stake out an issue Bayh fuzzes his position in an effort to convince voters there is no difference between them except Bayh’s six years of experience and seniority. But Bayh said he favors stopping the bombing of North Vietnam with no strings attached. Ruckelshaus would want proof it would not put American troops in danger.”

On November 6, 1968, Indiana newspapers declared, “Nixon’s the One!” In the U.S. Senate race, however, Ruck-



The U.S. Seante candiate turms 36. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

elshaus wasn't. Bayh was narrowly re-elected, winning 51 percent of the vote. "The incumbent has a hell of an advantage," Ruckelshaus says. "I never realized how much until I decided to run against one."

THE OFFER FROM the White House presented itself by way of John Mitchell, a municipal bond lawyer and the new U.S. attorney general. (He'd later become a mentor to Ruckelshaus. But he baffled the Hoosier just the same. "I never met a public figure who cared less what people thought about him than Mitchell did," Ruckelshaus says.)

The two men met at the Pierre Hotel in New York after Ruckelshaus' defeat in Indiana. The Hoosier agreed to sign on with the Justice Department as an assistant attorney general.

Ruckelshaus took on prodigious responsibility when he accepted a job to lead the Civil Division. He managed 200 lawyers and thousands of pending cases. What's more, he moved his family to Maryland in January 1969, an unsettled time. Nixon's inauguration marked "the first in which federal troops were brought into Washington in fear of disturbances," recalled Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an adviser. "It gave you an eerie feeling to see troop carriers and tanks roll in here alongside the Executive Office Building, where a command post was set up. Every major presidential aide had a phone connected directly to riot control headquarters of the District of Columbia police."

Part of Ruckelshaus' new job was to manage the civil disturbance unit. That meant traveling the country to observe potential riots, mostly at college campuses. "If the situation got out of hand, I was to coordinate the activation of federal troops for the president," Ruckelshaus said. At a self-described "kamikaze tour" of college campuses designed to soften relations with the Administration, students fired questions on everything from civil rights to conspiracy. "What about Bobby Seale, you #@*%#!?" someone at Mount Holyoke College yelled. A handful of students brazenly smoked pot in the front row.

"You had a student fear of repression that was almost rampant due to the war and a lot of other circumstances,"

Ruckelshaus said, “a feeling that society was repressing them, the government was actually depriving the individual of his liberties. . . . But I did not believe that from my vantage point there was anywhere near the amount of repression that so many students felt—that so many in the society felt. But I’m not so sure that that was what was important. Whether it was true or not, the important thing was that a number of people felt repression as a fact of life in our society.”

Ruckelshaus did not stay for long at the Justice Department.

THE NATIONAL PRESS described him as “a bit bookish” and the “voice of conciliation and pragmatism” when Ruckelshaus took over the Environmental Protection Agency. The new job would test his sensibilities like never before.

Pollution was something you could see, taste and feel back in 1970. It veiled city skylines, closed popular beaches and streamed from tailpipes along America’s highways. During a nationwide call-to-action in April, 20 million people poured into the streets from Philadelphia to Los Angeles. Earth Day demonstrators asked New Yorkers to imagine a world without automobiles and the mayor closed part of Fifth Avenue. In Madison, Wisconsin, someone read from the *Book of Genesis* and issued an apology to God for abusing the planet. Sen. Gaylord Nelson, a Wisconsin Democrat, unveiled the concept of “Earth Day” a year earlier in Seattle. The response “was electric,” he said. “It took off like gangbusters. Telegrams, letters and telephone inquiries poured in from all across the country.”

The groundswell couldn’t be ignored. “Nixon didn’t particu-



From the start, “Mr. Clean” appeared steady in the crossfire at the helm of the EPA. December 1970. EPA



DOCUMERICA, a national project spearheaded by the Environmental Protection Agency captures everyday life in the 1970s. A 1972 snapshot of a freeway in Hollywood. *National Archives*

larly understand the environment,” recalled Angell, one of the first EPA employees. “He wasn’t an environmentalist by any stretch of the imagination. But what he did understand was politics and political forces. He understood that this was a very big issue.”

And very complex. Ruckelshaus assumed polluters could be mildly coerced. But he walked a delicate tightrope between corporate giants and impassioned environmentalists. A General Motors executive called him “the greatest friend to American industry since Karl Marx.” A detractor on the other side of the debate charged: “You ought to be called the Big Business Protection Agency.” The manager of a steel company lashed out at Ruckelshaus for attempting to turn the Cuyahoga River into a “trout stream.” Distraught that the EPA refused to place air-monitoring devices in his neighborhood, one man yelled, “Don’t give me that crap, Ruckelshaus! Our kids are dying!”

Just days on the job, the EPA chief stunned city managers of Atlanta, Cleveland and Detroit. He cited them for violating water quality standards and gave them 180 days to curb pollution or face the Justice Department in court.

Ruckelshaus made the shocking announcement as Atlanta hosted a national gathering of city leaders. He charged

the host city with dumping some "32 million gallons of untreated effluents" and another "40 million gallons with only primary treatment" each day into the Chattahoochee River. The Chattahoochee flows more than 400 miles from northeastern Georgia to northern Florida. When it reaches Alabama, Ruckelshaus said, it is "virtually an open sewer."

No municipality discharged as many pollutants into the befouled Lake Erie as the city of Detroit, according to the EPA. Chronic holdups in the implementation of sewage treatment facilities didn't help a body of water described as a "virtual dump to the effluents of more than 12 million people."

"Some contend that the lake is dead," Ruckelshaus said, "but massive corrective action and hard, prompt enforcement proceedings can save the lake. This is just what we intend to do."

When he called out Cleveland administrators for foot dragging, the mayor barreled into a press conference and accused Ruckelshaus of hiding behind federal inaction, overlooking the city's hefty investment in waste treatment and targeting cities that were strongholds for Democrats. "This is a politically motivated cheap shot!" Carl Stokes charged. "Was it a mere coincidence

that a Republican administration had singled out three cities led by Democratic mayors?"

"It is not a cheap political trick," Ruckelshaus said. "It is an effort to bring everybody's attention to this problem." Ruckelshaus declared that his agency would use its authority to reverse trends and save the lake.

The EPA broached a deal with the three cities in the spring of '71. In Cleveland and Detroit, the billion-dollar pact would pay for sewage treatment facilities



"Lake Erie, the Dead Sea?"
Bill Roberts/Cleveland Press



“People not only heard and saw problems of pollution on television every night, they witnessed it on the way to work,” Ruckelshaus said. The Clark Avenue Bridge in Cleveland, Ohio. *National Archives*

designed to remove the vast majority of contaminants flowing into the lake. Atlanta agreed to construct a treatment plant to halt pollution practices contaminating the Chattahoochee River. The United States and Canada signed an accord to limit pollutants into the Great Lakes in 1972.

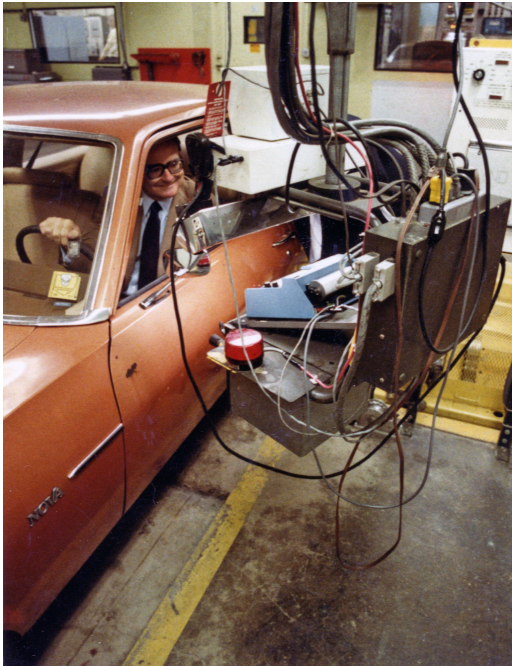
BUT THE COUNTRY GRAPPLED with far more than deteriorating lakes and polluted rivers. “I remember the first time I moved to Washington, D.C., and the air was brown as I’d go to work in the morning,” Ruckelshaus says. Once at the helm of the EPA, it didn’t take Ruckelshaus long to conclude that “as a society we know very little about what we are doing to ourselves.” Part of the problem in prosperous post-war America rested with every consumer driving a car and heading for the suburbs.

The United States Congress passed the Clean Air Act in 1970. The landmark legislation slashed car emissions and fueled an uproar in the auto industry. The new law set emissions standards for automobiles that called for a 90 percent reduction of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide by 1975 and the same reduction of nitrogen oxides by 1976. (At the time, a

single car might release "520 pounds of hydrocarbons, 1,700 pounds of carbon monoxide, and 90 pounds of nitrogen oxide" every 10,000 miles on the highway.)

Carmakers claimed the restrictions would shut down the industry with more expensive cars rolling off the lots and forecast a 3 percent reduction in sales. The president of Ford Motor Company warned that the industry was "backed to the cliff edge of desperation."

The automakers demanded a one-year extension to meet the new standards, leaving Ruckelshaus with another highly scrutinized and difficult decision. Further complicating matters, the president admired the captains of industry. Worried about White House interference, Ruckelshaus drew the line. "I told the White House it was my decision, the law made it my decision, and that they should stay out. They agreed with alacrity and they stayed out, and I haven't talked with them since."



Ruckelshaus battled with American automakers to clear dirty air by reducing dangerous emissions. At the EPA's Ann Arbor Motor Vehicle Emission Laboratory. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

Ruckelshaus didn't buy the carmakers' claims, and he denied their requests for an extension. Catalytic converters were in the works that converted the dangerous emissions into water vapor or harmless carbon dioxide. And he didn't believe the industry had made a "good faith effort" to reach pollution abatement goals. "I thought we had to do something that would say, 'This is a serious exercise here. This isn't something

you should take lightly—just think you can come in and make a token appearance in front of the EPA administrator and get a year’s extension.’ ”

“You should have seen the look of awe and respect,” an EPA employee recalled after the announcement was made. “The decision did a lot for the esprit over here. It took real guts.”

America’s auto industry agreed to the use of catalytic converters by 1973, dramatically cutting emissions in 1975 models. Stronger restrictions on leaded gasoline followed to protect the converters from contamination. Eventually, the converters helped phase the lead out of gasoline.

YOU CAN STILL find Ruckelshaus in the news for banning DDT, a controversial pesticide hailed on the one hand for saving lives and denounced on the other as a threat to the environment and mankind. By attacking the nervous system of organisms, DDT could knock out the anopheles mosquito that transmits malaria and the body louse that carries typhus fever. By 1948, it was estimated to have saved hundreds of thousands of lives—the would-be victims of spotted fever, typhus and malaria. DDT also triggered bumper harvests. The compound eradicated the Colorado potato beetle and attacked destructive irritants for farmers, ranchers and gardeners. Despite its potency, its use was once widespread. In the 1940s and 1950s, children frolicked in plumes of the pesticide that shot from the backs of trucks in their neighborhoods. In 1959, a peak year, the United States released some 80 million pounds of DDT.

The chemical was criticized as an environmental hazard and a threat to humans. As early as 1945, an amateur environmentalist in the South Pacific noted, “It killed every insect. The Lord knows what’s going to happen if they start using it promiscuously in the States.”

“A spray as indiscriminate as DDT can upset the economy of nature as much as a revolution upsets social economy,” warned Edwin Tealer, a past president of the New York Entomological Society. “Ninety percent of all insects are good, and if they are killed, things go out of kilter right away.”

In 1969, the Environmental Defense Fund petitioned the

Secretary of Agriculture to ban DDT. The lawsuit landed on the desk of Bill Ruckelshaus with the creation of the EPA. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, or FIFRA, required Ruckelshaus to weigh risks DDT posed to people and the environment against its benefits to society.

Ruckelshaus “canceled” the insecticide to trigger hearings where the pesticide could be fully explored. An examiner would make a decision and pass it on to Ruckelshaus for a final verdict. After considering testimony from more than 300 witnesses, the hearing examiner declared, “DDT is not a carcinogenic hazard to man.”

“There then was an appeal to me as the administrator,” Ruckelshaus remembers. But the administrator disagreed. DDT caused raptors like peregrine falcons or bald eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs so fragile they’d crack before the babies could hatch. And 70 percent of DDT was used on cotton. “More and more of it had to be used,” Ruckelshaus says. “You put more and more of it into the environment and it was having less and less effect on the target species. They were building up resistance to it. There was no evidence that there was any health effect from [DDT] but if we guessed wrong—and it was in the fatty tissue of man in substantial amounts—we could really have a problem on our hands.”



DDT, the toxic pesticide, shoots into the air on a public beach to control mosquitoes. In 1959 the United States released 80 million pounds of the chemical. Jones Beach State Park, Long Island, 1945. *Bettmann/Corbis*

Furor surrounded the decision. “It was a curious procedure,” Ruckelshaus says. “The people in the pesticide office represented the interest of suspending the use of the material, or canceling its use. The pesticide companies from outside represented the interest in continuing its use. So, I had employees of ours on one side and the regulated community on the other side. That’s an awkward procedure to say the least.

“And the appeal came from the hearing officer who was also an employee of EPA, but an independent hearing officer. He wasn’t part of the general employee base. He had a strong bias against the pesticide office that was trying to cancel the pesticide.”

Nixon introduced another concern. John Ehrlichman, an aide to the president, contacted Ruckelshaus “before the decision was made and before I had decided what to do.” In this call, the influential Nixon aide recited the president’s admiration for Norman Borlaug, the father of the “green revolution” and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. According to Ehrlichman, Borlaug had expressed to the president some concern about what the decision on DDT would be. Ruckelshaus adds, “Ehrlichman passed on that concern to me without telling me what the president wanted me to do or even suggesting the president was going to contact me about decision.” Concerned the president would interfere, Ruckelshaus met with John Mitchell. He “never heard another word from the White House.”

In June 1972, Ruckelshaus officially banned most uses of DDT in the United States. “There is no question it was politically charged and I was accused of making it a political decision. I talked to a reporter from *Chemical Week* who asked whether it was political. I said small ‘p’ political—in the sense of a society trying to decide what risk it’s willing to accept for what benefits. But I’m not talking about big ‘P’ politics. His editorial said that I admitted it was a political decision.”

Criticism over the ban has never let up. “I have been accused of killing 30 million people of malaria and all kinds of wonderful things,” Ruckelshaus said. “[The ban] applied only to this country; there is no malaria in this country. If I were in Sri Lanka or in Chad or some other country where malaria was a



Ruckelshaus invited the public to weigh in on the fate of a copper smelter in Tacoma, a major employer that produced arsenic emissions. “For me to sit here in Washington and tell the people of Tacoma what is an acceptable risk would be at best arrogant and at worst inexcusable.” *National Archives*

real problem, it would have been a different matter altogether.”

Ruckelshaus received high marks for his performance as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. In his first two months, the “EPA brought five times as many enforcement actions as all of its inherited agencies combined had initiated in any previous two-month period,” one observer said. “He does his homework. He’s bright—uncommonly bright for this Administration. He may be wrong on policy, but never on the facts.” *Time* magazine wrote, “Environmentalists generally praise the big, bespectacled ex-Justice Department lawyer as Nixon’s best appointment. Even businessmen temper their complaints.”

Despite Nixon’s lack of enthusiasm for the environment,

Ruckelshaus says “his record was quite good regardless of the motivation and he deserves credit for that.”

REPORTS LINKING THE Nixon Administration to wiretaps of government employees and newsmen hit *The New York Times* early in Ruckelshaus' tenure as acting director at the FBI in the spring of 1973. Agents confirmed the electronic surveillance, but logs of the wiretaps were nowhere to be found. The missing files were “like an open wound,” Ruckelshaus remembers. (“I’ve heard about these wiretaps for years,” one FBI archivist said. “But they’re not where they should be.”)

In a seven-day inquiry, FBI headquarters personnel conducted 42 confidential interviews in five states. The investigation revealed that 13 government employees and four beat reporters had been bugged by the Bureau. To stop the story from leaking to reporters piece by piece, Ruckelshaus insisted the FBI hold its first press conference—ever. He released details of the inquiry and provided context, telling reporters the wiretaps stemmed from fears that leaks were compromising security and “this Nation’s effectiveness in negotiations and other dealings with foreign powers.” At the request of Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s national security adviser, the taps were eventually placed in May 1969, Ruckelshaus said. One phone was tapped for as long as 21 months. “I recognize how very emotional the question of wiretaps is in our society,” he acknowledged. “In case you think this is adding up to thousands of wiretaps, there are at present—and this is an average—107 total wiretaps being monitored by the FBI.” The controversial wiretap program had ended in February, 1973, Ruckelshaus said.

The missing logs turned up in a White House safe that had been used by John Ehrlichman. When Ruckelshaus sent an employee to retrieve them, the young man returned “shaken ... almost ashen.” As the story goes, he’d bumped into the president. Nixon asked what he was doing, grabbed the young man by the lapels and “scared him to death,” Ruckelshaus said. A second employee was dispatched. He returned with the missing logs, instantly elevating Ruckelshaus at the beleaguered Bureau. “People would stop me in the hall,” he said. “I

never did anything at the FBI that got me more favorable reaction from the employees than that.”

Coverage of the FBI taps didn’t stop. Ruckelshaus received a surprising call from a man who identified himself as a reporter. He told Ruckelshaus that Mark Felt, the No. 2 man at the Bureau was leaking classified information about the wiretaps. The caller said Felt ended each conversation with a reminder that he was a candidate for FBI director.

Confronted by Ruckelshaus, Felt angrily denied the charges. But he tendered his resignation the very next day after more than 30 years at the Bureau. Another 30 years would pass before Felt told *Vanity Fair*, “I’m the guy they called Deep Throat.” He was finally acknowledging his role as the pivotal source in the Watergate scandal. Ruckelshaus never considered Felt much of a “hero.” Rather, he was trying to “feather his own nest and undercut his bosses at the FBI.” Nor was Felt any fan

of Ruckelshaus. He remained highly critical of the acting director for his handling of the wiretaps and for the “staggering expense” of bringing together agents from around the country at the beginning of his tenure.

Ruckelshaus ran the FBI for only 71 days. Nixon named Clarence Kelley the new director. Kelley was a longtime FBI man who became police chief in Kansas City, Missouri, before taking over the Bureau.



Mark Felt, identified as a key Watergate source in 2005, resigned from the FBI after 30 years at the Bureau. Ruckelshaus says Felt was “no hero” for leaking information to *The Washington Post*. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

ELLIOT RICHARDSON, THE NEW attorney general, asked Ruckelshaus to stay on with the Justice Department as a special assistant and help “sort through the mess our leaders had gotten themselves and our country into.” The scandals included more than the Watergate affair and the questions surrounding the honesty of the 37th president. Within months, Nixon would address the nation, declaring “people have got to know whether or not their president is a crook. Well, I am not a crook. I have earned everything I have got.”

Ruckelshaus was offered the job as deputy attorney general that summer, and unanimously approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 13, 1973. He was promptly confirmed by the Senate. “You have done a magnificent job in everything you’ve been assigned to,” said Sen. Sam Ervin, the folksy North Carolina Democrat who headed the Senate Watergate Committee.

When Ruckelshaus accepted the deputy attorney general position, he told Richardson about his suspicions of the president’s guilt in the Watergate cover-up and possibly the burglary. Ruckelshaus had spent months investigating the case at the FBI. “All of the evidence that had been adduced pointed to him,” he said. And if Nixon’s chief of staff, Al Haig, ever asked Ruckelshaus his opinion of the president’s involvement, he would tell him. Haig never did.

“He saw what people were capable of,” Angell said of Ruckelshaus, summing up the months the cerebral Hoosier spent leading the Watergate investigation and weighing evidence. “I think it just offended every bone in his body.” That vein of bedrock integrity “defined the kind of person he was.”

A second scandal surfaced—this one unrelated to Watergate, but a blow nevertheless to the “law and order” theme that helped propel Nixon to the White House. Spiro T. Agnew, his sharp-tongued vice president, was at the heart of the most solid bribery case Ruckelshaus had ever seen. Agnew was a seasoned politician, elected chief executive of Baltimore County in 1961 and governor of Maryland in 1966. First as Nixon’s running mate, then as vice president, Agnew had developed a reputation as the president’s “hatchet man,” denouncing lib-

eral Democrats and the media, whom he famously branded “the nattering nabobs of negativism.” Ruckelshaus met Agnew on several occasions, yet never observed him being involved in any major policy decision. “He was just not around” whenever Nixon was considering “some issue that cut across the government,” Ruckelshaus remembered.

Agnew was now knee deep in an issue that cut to the heart of integrity in public service. The U.S. Attorney in Baltimore had uncovered evidence of widespread political corruption—bribes and payoffs dating from his days in the Maryland Governor’s Office right up to the present. Agnew stood accused of taking \$147,500 in bribes and another \$17,500 in cash in the basement of the White House.

It was a historically tragic summer for the country. In addition to the Agnew scandal and Watergate, insiders could see that the president was literally run down—emotionally and physically compromised. “You just had this sense that things were going to disintegrate,” recalls Angell. “What you didn’t want is something to happen to Nixon at a time when the vice president was about to be indicted for bribery. You



couldn’t really explain this to people because it was all very secret. That fragility and the succession in who was going to lead the country at that period of time was pretty astounding.”

Agnew confessed in a 40-page affidavit. He pleaded no contest to tax evasion charges and became the first American vice president to resign in disgrace. To fill the vacancy, Nixon nominated Gerald R. Ford, the House minority leader from Michigan.

In early October, Ruckelshaus headed for Grand Rapids to supervise the FBI background check on the nominee, a well-liked old-shoe politician. “They had about 75 agents up there questioning everybody in town,” Ruckelshaus said, “and the place was a state of mild hysteria.” But on his way out the door the attorney general informed him of a development more troubling than the Agnew crisis. “Good Lord, how can that be?” Ruckelshaus thought. The president wanted to fire Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor. Ruckelshaus never expected Nixon to follow through with his threat because “the public won’t tolerate it.”

THE NIXON PRESIDENCY had rapidly deteriorated with the Agnew threat hanging over the White House, and with bombshell developments in the Watergate case. In July, Alexander Butterfield, a former deputy chief of staff, informed the Senate Watergate Committee of a secret taping system in the White House. (Nixon ordered the Secret Service to install the taping system in 1971. Some 3,700 hours of conversations would be recorded during his presidency.)

“I didn’t want to lie,” Butterfield said. “I never entertained the thought of lying. But I knew what a big secret this was to Nixon.”

Pressure continued to mount as Nixon refused to turn the tapes over to Watergate investigators. His attorneys argued that they were protected by executive privilege. Cox refused to back off on his demand. Nor would he accept compromises in the terms of their release.

He was getting too close to conclusive evidence of a cover-up, Ruckelshaus says.



“I didn’t want to lie,” said Alexander Butterfield, the pivotal Watergate figure who disclosed a secret taping system at the White House. *National Archives*

"Cox, given the Supreme Court mandate, was entirely within his right to ask for the tapes. Letting the White House first scrub them up to their liking was not going to satisfy him."

October 20, 1973, marked the great upheaval known as the "Saturday Night Massacre." The president ordered the attorney general to fire Archibald Cox. Richardson refused and submitted his resignation. Al Haig, the four-star general who was now Nixon's chief of staff, called Ruckelshaus.

"Al Haig is on the phone and wants to talk to you," a secretary said. The admonition from Haig couldn't have been clearer, "This is an order from your commander in chief!" he told Ruckelshaus. "It was as if he was going to bring a tank over there and blow me out of my office if I didn't do it."

It was a command Ruckelshaus couldn't stomach, even in the midst of an escalating drama fraught with political allegiances—and potential consequences. The conversation would trigger debate over the years. Was he fired or did he quit? "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because it was clear in conversation with Haig that if I didn't do what he and the president were ordering me to do I was gone."

It wasn't the first time the White House had contacted Ruckelshaus. He often took calls from Haig while he investigated the Watergate case at the FBI. Haig would complain "about the Special Prosecutor moving into areas that were really quite peripheral to Watergate," Ruckelshaus said. "In almost every instance that I can recall, when I would raise those objections to Cox, he [Cox] backed off."

"Not only did I think there was no justification" for firing Cox, "I felt he should have been commended for the way he was conducting his responsibility," Ruckelshaus continued. "When it came time to decide what to do, there was no way I could carry out the president's wishes."

He faced no internal conflict after telling Haig he wouldn't carry out the order. Ruckelshaus believed Nixon had the power to fire Cox. "It was the question of whether that was an appropriate exercise of that power."

Haig asked to speak with Robert Bork, next in line at the Justice Department. Ruckelshaus told him "if his conscience

didn't bother him, his analysis was sound." Bork later said he fired Cox to save the Justice Department from the appointment of an outsider as attorney general. "The department would be crippled by a mass resignation of angry career lawyers," he wrote.

Ruckelshaus typed his resignation letter and chaos ensued. "The FBI stationed people around my office in the Justice Department as well as Elliot's office. And the cameras got up there and took pictures of it. They sealed off the special prosecutor's office. And a lot of these young guys were around there interviewing anybody that wanted to listen to them. Somebody compared it to the banana republic kind of revolution."

At a long-planned party after he left the Justice Department that night, Ruckelshaus related the astonishing turn of events to a *Washington Post* reporter who "went charging

out the door to write the story." John Chancellor with NBC News broke into programming: "Good evening. The country tonight is in the midst of what may be the most serious Constitutional crisis in its history."

The Ruckelshaus children heard the news report and thundered down the stairs at the home of family friends. "Dad's been fired! Dad's been fired!"

"Their reaction was that I had done something terrible—otherwise why would the president fire me?"

Ruckelshaus returned to his home in Rockville, Maryland, where he was deluged by questions from waiting journalists. He finally relented and gave an interview "just to be able to go to sleep."



Ruckelshaus leaves his office on October 20, 1973, the day of the so-called Saturday Night Massacre. "Dad's been fired!" his kids yell when a commentator breaks into programming and announces Ruckelshaus is out. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

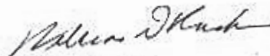
Dear Mr. President,

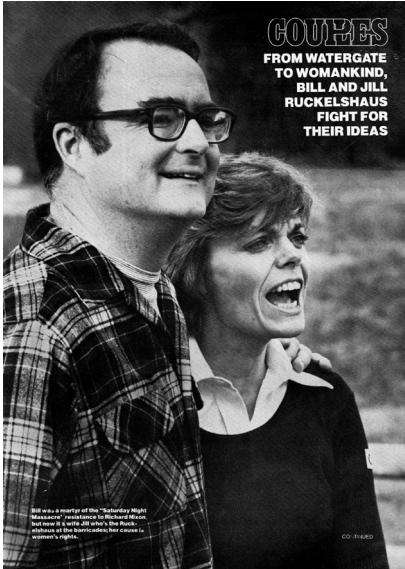
It is with deep regret that I tender my resignation. During your Administration, you have honored me with four appointments- first in the Justice Department's Civil Division, then as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, next as acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and finally as Deputy Attorney General. I have found the challenge of working in the high levels of American Government an unforgettable and rewarding experience.

I shall always be grateful for your having given me the opportunity to serve the American people in this fashion.

I am, of course, sorry that my conscience will not permit me to carry out your instruction to discharge Archibald Cox. My disagreement with that action at this time is too fundamental to permit me to act otherwise.

I wish you every success during the remainder of your Administration.


Respectfully,



Bill and Jill raised five kids during the upheaval at the nation's capitol. Throughout her career, Jill championed women's issues and civil rights for several American presidents, including Nixon.

Hunkered down, Nixon toiled on in growing seclusion. Fifty-thousand telegrams arrived on Capitol Hill—the majority calling for the president's impeachment. A throng of sign-waving protesters paraded outside the iron gates to the White House: *Impeach Nixon! Impeach Nixon!*

Ruckelshaus packed his fishing gear and returned to his roots. He slipped on a beige windbreaker and escaped to Chesapeake Bay where news cameras caught him with a bluefish and a satisfied grin. "Every now and then," Ruckelshaus ruminates, "I'll see a man or

a woman get involved in one of these scandals where the press parks out in front of their house. What do they think they're going to tell them?"

More than 2,000 people sent hand-written letters, cards or telegrams. "It is a rare pleasure to see a man in public life act according to his conscience," one admirer wrote.

The investigation into the Watergate affair continued, momentum building. The president released the tapes in the summer of 1974 with 18 1/2 minutes of missing audio. But they included the so-called "smoking gun"; the president had suggested that the CIA be prodded to halt the FBI investigation into the scandal. Facing impeachment, Nixon resigned in disgrace on August 9, 1974. "I let the American people down," the president said in retrospect. "And I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life."

“ In my wildest dreams, I never realized he would do something like he was doing during the Watergate. ”

AFTER MORE THAN a half-century together, Jill Ruckelshaus, Bill’s wife, reflected on the “Saturday Night Massacre” and their life afterward: “I think he’s still deeply disappointed in Nixon,” she said in their home near Seattle. “He thought Nixon did so much to cause the American public to lose faith in its government. We had a long string through there. Kennedy was shot, there was the war, and LBJ only served one term. Nixon was elected and got re-elected but then he was impeached. It was just a really terrible time for the country.”



“The one very impressive thing about them is their ability not to take themselves too seriously,” says a former law partner. “They kid each other pretty vigorously and keep themselves in perspective.” Bill and Jill have been married since 1962. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

But Bill never felt regretful, she said. He just moved on with his usual optimism.

Ruckelshaus moved to the Pacific Northwest as a senior vice president for the Weyerhaeuser Company. Later he became strategic director of the Madrona Venture Group, a venture capital firm, and the chairman of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a UW-WSU collaboration that focuses on complex public policy.

His reputation as an American political hero has always endured. In 1976, Gerald Ford looked at Ruckelshaus as a possible running mate. President Reagan brought him back to the EPA in 1983 to mend a broken agency and boost the morale



Bill agreed to take over the EPA a second time in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan. He was dubbed a hero for boosting morale and increasing transparency of the beleaguered agency. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

of demoralized employees. Ruckelshaus made national headlines for allowing the public to weigh in on the fate of a Tacoma smelter when the agency called for new emissions standards. His political savvy and his extensive knowledge of the environment have aided in the restoration of Puget Sound.

Still, it is his role in a prominent chapter of American political history for which he is best known. The scandal that brought down a presidency never soured the longtime Washingtonian on the country's bedrock principles. In the last decade alone, he has made 400 speeches, many to help restore an erosion of trust in public servants he personally witnessed at the highest echelons of power.

His belief in justice—evident in his Midwest roots; in the son he named William Justice; in every biography of an American president he's ever read—was still apparent when he handed a small edition of the U.S. Constitution to guests celebrating his 80th birthday. "He's intensely sincere," says Jerry Grinstein, a strategic director at Madrona and the former CEO of Delta Airlines. "He is also very patriotic. He loves this country. He loves what it stands for." In 2015, President Obama awarded Ruckelshaus the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor.

Angell has always admired Ruckelshaus' priorities. "He's got a remarkable family, a remarkable bunch of children, and



The White House recognized Ruckelshaus as a “dedicated public servant who has worked tirelessly to protect public health and combat global challenges like climate change.” The now longtime Washingtonian says, “My life has been made far richer as a result as my service in government.”

White House

a remarkable wife. It’s interesting that all that holds together through all the kinds of sacrifices and demands that a career like his makes on a person.”

“When you marry you have your reasons,” Jill says, “but the longer you live with somebody that you like, the more you love them; the more you see, the more you watch them making their way through life, and confronting one thing after another, and how they handle it. He never feels sorry for himself. He’s rarely angry with anyone. I’ve never seen Billy do a small thing. I’ve never seen him try to have an advantage over somebody. And he would *never* try to one-up somebody. He wasn’t raised like that. You weren’t a show off. You didn’t brag.

“You just were who you were.”

Trova Heffernan
Legacy Washington
Office of the Secretary of State
Published 2016



Ruckelshaus remains committed to the environment. He chaired the Salmon Recovery Board, co-chaired the Puget Sound Partnership and the Ocean Acidification Blue Ribbon Panel. In 1997, President Clinton named Ruckelshaus as U.S. envoy in the implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. In 2001, President Bush appointed him to the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. Above, the well-travelled Ruckelshaus says there's no place he'd rather live than Washington. *Laura Mott*

RUCKELSHAUS! RUCKELSHAUS!

(To the tune of "Camelot")

They're here! They're here! Attention, people, please!
Let's toast our hosts and roast our honorees!

In politics, a chance sometimes arises to prove if
you're a man or you're a mouse, and rise above a
scandal or a crisis ... Bill Ruckelshaus!

For Forty-some-odd years, he's been a beacon of
traits one only finds in Eagle Scouts ...
When Watergate went wrong, he didn't weaken!
Bill Ruckelshaus!

Bill Ruckelshaus! / Bill Ruckelshaus!
He wouldn't bow to Tricky Dick!
Bill Ruckelshaus! / Bill Ruckelshaus!
To Kowtow is not his schtick!

Then when he led as head of Weyerhaeuser, he
raised the bar for future CEO's ...
To find a guy to chair
Who'll genuinely care
Is very rare, but thank God there
is Will- ... Iam ... Ruck- ... Els ... Haus!

Like any great man, if you look behind him,
You'll find a most extraordinary spouse ...
Bill wed the G.O.P.'s own Gloria Steinem:
Jill Ruckelshaus!

The starlet of Seattle's social season,
The symphony played her "Die Fledermaus" ...
To help the Lakeside School, She'll lose all reason:
Jill Ruckelshaus!

Jill Ruckelshaus! Jill Ruckelshaus!
Philanthropist *par excellence*!
Jill Ruckelshaus! Jill Ruckelshaus!
To give is what she wants!

Together, as a couple, they've got power ...
Their Influential friends know they've got clout! As
buddies, they're all swell,
Especially Major Paul Schell ...
Our couple of the hour:
Jill and Will- ... Iam ... Ruck- ... Els ... Haus!

Washington News Council, 2007

DONALD TOBIN
1150 PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10028

October 21st

Dear Mr. Rickalhus,

I am writing this letter
to convey to you my fullest support
on your recent action. It is a
rare pleasure to see a man in
public life act according to
his conscience.

Very truly yours,
Donald Tobin

More than 2,000 people applauded Bill's bravery in letters, telegrams and cards when he walked off the job in 1973.



Bill's proudest accomplishment remains family. Once labeled a "realistic Brady Bunch" with a station wagon, a job chart and a basketball hoop in the yard, the Ruckelshaus family has grown. Bill and Jill are now the proud grandparents of 12. *Bill Ruckelshaus collection*

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THE WHITE HOUSE TAPES

One of the most defining days of Ruckelshaus' career with the Nixon Administration took place on April 27, 1973, when he met the president in the Oval Office. It was the only time the two would speak there without the presence of an aide. Their conversation took place from 3:48 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Like the presidents before him, Nixon relied on a taping system to document his conversations. Thousands of hours of his private discussions were recorded between 1971 and 1973. The “Conscience of Mr. Clean” relies on a transcript of the late afternoon conversation between Ruckelshaus and Nixon in the spring of 1973.

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