

The national scene

Ruckelshaus predictions in talk here come true

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

It is interesting to note that many of the predictions of William D. Ruckelshaus, the new Environmental Protection Agency administrator, expounded in Idaho Falls five years ago are coming true.

Ruckelshaus was the main speaker in Idaho Falls at the state convention of the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry Sept. 27, 1978. He embellished on his remarks in a Post-Register interview.

Known as "Mr. Clean" even in those days for his impeccable political record, his ascendancy to the top EPA post should give that troubled agency high credibility.

Ruckelshaus last week was confirmed by the Senate to replace Anne M. Burford, who resigned March 9 amid controversies involving alleged mismanagement and political favoritism at the agency.

Ruckelshaus pointed out in his talk five years ago in Idaho Falls it took this nation 200 years to reach the pollution stage and it can't be solved in five years. He said government regulations are here to



Ruckelshaus

stay but the problem lies in retaining those which are essential.

He then observed the problem hinges on making these regulations work better, adding "we are not going to get rid of them. He also warned against "setting standards that we are incapable of achieving."

He said when the environmental movement first started a decade back there was a flurry of regulations but this has now abated so that efforts are being made to promulgate the reasonable laws and regulations. He said then that many laws are excellent to protect health, safety and environment, but others are needless.

One of the most significant statements he made then and which has stuck in mind ever since was to the effect "most people are idealistic conservatives but operating liberals." In other words, they rail against government interference and spending, but they want many of these services.

He added the majority of people are incensed at governmental regulations but they give overwhelming support to those that protect the environmental and governmental responsibilities.

Ruckelshaus has had one of the most astonishing political records of any person on the national scene. He was the first EPA administrator from its inception in 1970 until 1973. He also was assistant attorney general, acting director of the FBI, deputy attorney gen-

eral and even attorney general for 30 minutes during the tumultuous days of Watergate.

President Richard M. Nixon fired him as deputy attorney general during the 1973 incident known as the "Saturday Night Massacre" when he refused to follow the president's order to dismiss Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox.

Now 50, he was senior vice president of law and corporate affairs of the Weyerhaeuser Co., a timber and paper products firm based near Seattle, before plucked by President Reagan to straighten out the agency.

In accepting the position, he followed his own advise given in Idaho Falls five years ago. He said then he cherished his past political experience and advised people to accept positions in government if offered the opportunity.

Already he has moved quickly, issuing ethics guidelines to govern contacts with polluting companies and others doing business with his agency. He has asked for resignations of several top officials for alleged wrongdoings.

Even the avid environmentalists are pleased. It's no wonder he was confirmed unanimously in the Senate without a single harsh word uttered against him.

Ruckelshaus made his name as a tough first EPA administrator but his reputation chiefly rests not on the work he did but the way he left. He took a stand on principle during Watergate and packed his bag.