

Our dear and respected friend San Dash, counsel in Watergate hearings, dies.



Lawyer best known for his interrogations into Nixon's secret tapes.

Sam Dash, the former chief Watergate counsel who became a household name in the 1970s for his penetrating interrogations into President Nixon's secret taping system, died Saturday after a lengthy illness, his family said.

Dash, who cultivated a reputation for independence and as an ardent advocate for legal ethics, was 79. He died early Saturday at the Washington Hospital Center, according to family members.

Dash had taught constitutional law and legal ethics at Georgetown University Law Center until January. After that, he "*went to the hospital and never came back*," said David Molyneaux, his son-in-law.

As the lead lawyer on Sen. Sam Ervin's Select Committee on Watergate, Dash became known across the country during the committee's televised hearings.

During a pivotal moment in the 1973 hearings, Dash pressed White House aide Alexander Butterfield over who knew about a secret taping system in the Oval Office.

"The president ...," Butterfield replied. The existence of the tapes led to Nixon's resignation in August 1974.

A lifelong Democrat, Dash again made headlines in 1994 when he agreed to serve as the ethics adviser to independent counsel Kenneth Starr in the Whitewater investigation of President Clinton.

But he resigned four years later, saying that Starr “unlawfully intruded” by aggressively advocating that Clinton be impeached. Dash, in fact, helped draft the independent counsel law that Congress passed as part of the post-Watergate reforms aimed at assuring impartial investigations of certain activities in the executive branch.

“As a prosecutor, your job is to seek justice, not just to convict. Other lawyers feel this way too, but it is an absolute mission with me,” said Dash in explaining his criticism of Starr.

A lawyer for more than a half century, Dash recently had expressed concern about the threats to individual freedoms as a result of the Bush administration’s fight against terrorism.

In a book on the Fourth Amendment, scheduled to be released next month, Dash complains about “the Bush administration’s increasing intrusions on the privacy rights of American citizens in the post Sept. 11 world,” according to Molyneaux, citing a quote on the book’s cover.

A native of Camden, N.J., Dash was an Air Force officer in World War II, and was a graduate of Harvard Law School.

At 30, Dash became a district attorney in Philadelphia, but later turned to private law practice. In the 1970s, he helped Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger in devising the American Bar Association’s ethical standards for prosecutors and criminal defense lawyers.

Sam Dash (1923-2004)

Written by ZoneZero

Dash is survived by his wife, Sara, of Chevy Chase, Md., and daughters Judi Dash of Beachwood, Ohio, and Rachel Dash of Charleston, W.Va.

<http://zonezero.com/magazine/obituaries/dash/dash.html>