



Elliot Richardson: The Virtue of Politics

Tom Vance

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This biography of Elliot L. Richardson (1920-1999) was originally available as an online publication by the Council for Excellence in Government in 2000. Richardson has the distinction of holding two records in American history. As a lawyer, he was the only person to serve as a U.S. Attorney, State Attorney General, and U.S. Attorney General. As a politician, he headed four federal cabinet departments: the former Health, Education & Welfare; Defense; Justice; and Commerce. His legacy as a brilliant and versatile public servant is equaled by only a handful of Americans. But he is primarily remembered for his courageous actions as U.S. Attorney General during the 1973 Watergate investigation. Although he served in this post for only five months, his tenure at the Justice Department has no precedent. While widely known for his resignation over Watergate, less known is that he was responsible for the simultaneous investigations of both Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and President Richard M. Nixon. Richardson succeeded in persuading the Vice President to resign, clearing the way for the appointment of Gerald R. Ford as vice president before President Nixon became the first president to resign from office. Richardson believed that "politics is the most difficult of the arts and the noblest of professions." Tom Vance, MA in U.S. History with a concentration in biography from Western Michigan University, is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve. Nicholas V. Prass is a Cum Laude graduate from Great Lakes Christian College, Michigan, with a double major in History and Bible Theology.

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