Legal Services Corp. chief resigns

By Aaron Stein and Dale Hamsperg

WASHINGTON — Under pressure from members of Congress and the employees under him, Donald Bogard has resigned after two years of bitter controversy as president of the Legal Services Corp.

The resignation, confirmed yesterday by a corporation spokesman, removes a major source of conflict over how the taxpayer-financed corporation delivers legal aid to noncriminal matters to poor people throughout the nation.

Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), a frequent critic of Bogard’s management tactics, said that Bogard’s departure from his $48,000-a-year job would be “good for the agency” and “the right sort of leadership” to take over.

Bogard’s leaving may end the disputes shadowing the agency.

The corporation’s board of directors, who have yet to be confirmed by the Senate, said that Bogard’s resignation would make it easier for the agency to regain congressional confidence and lift itself of limitations imposed by a persistent Congress.

Congress has listened closely to the corporation in its efforts to rein in President Reagan’s continuing efforts to abolish the legal services program through his budget and appointment powers. Reagan and other conservatives believe that the program has become an uncontrolled effort sponsored by the government to engineer social change.

Bogard has said he was trying to correct what he considered the “costs” of the program — $350 million in expenses.

The corporation, which serves about 3,500 legal aid groups, was formed in 1977 with the intention of helping the poor with legal aid.

Bogard has been praised for his efforts to cut costs and eliminate duplicative agency efforts, in particular by reducing the number of lawyers and paralegals.

His resignation, which takes effect Jan. 31, was “a significant step in getting legal services back on course, but only a first step,” said Jim Bovard, president of the union.

Bogard, who has about a year and a half remaining on his employment contract, was unavailable for comment.