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The Howard Hughes Memos

We have seen the Howard Hughes documents which White House under-covermen G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt apparently tried to steal from Las Vegas publisher Hank Greenspun's safe. Most of them are hand-scrawled memos from the reclusive billionaire to his former Nevada honcho, Robert Maheu.

On March 14, 1968, for example Hughes directed Maheu to approach Richard Nixon "as my special confidential emissary" and to help him win the presidency "under our sponsorship and supervision." Hughes followed up with a \$100,000 contribution out of his gambling profits, delivered in cash by casino operator Richard Danner to Nixon's crony, Bebe Rebozo.

At the same time, the industrialist asked Maheu "to get word" to Nixon's rival, Hubert Humphrey, "on a basis of secrecy that is really, really reliable that we will give him immediately full unlimited support for his campaign to enter the White House." But in return, Hughes wanted Humphrey, then the Vice President, to stop nuclear testing in Nevada.

Watergate wiretapper James McCord has testified about the plans to break into Greenspun's safe and fly the papers out of the country in a plane owned by Hughes. He quoted Liddy as saying that, after the safe had been burglarized, "the entry team would go directly to an airport near Las Vegas where a Howard Hughes plane would be standing by to fly the team directly into a Central American country."

McCord had the impression that the White House burglary team sought "blackmail type information involving a Democratic candidate for President." Greenspun said his safe contained nothing incriminating against a Democratic presidential prospect, except for the records of a minor hunting violation by Sen. Edmund Muskie (D-Me.). What Liddy and Hunt obviously sought, said Greenspun, were Hughes' private papers. This would explain why Hughes would provide the get-away plane.

Greenspun refused to divulge the contents of the Hughes papers to reporters. He also said he would "go to the can for life rather than surrender those documents." He confirmed, how-

ever, that the memos in our possession, handwritten by Hughes, are among those locked in his safe.

The crusading Las Vegas publisher said "Hughes would give anything to get his hands" on these files. Greenspun mentioned only that some of the memos dealt with Hughes' anti-trust troubles. When the Justice Department threatened to go to court to block Hughes from amassing more casinos, we can now report, Maheu confided to Hughes that "many friends in Washington" had intervened. Among them, he said, was Senate Judiciary Chairman James Eastland (D-Miss.).

Both Nevada senators, Alan Bible and Howard Cannon, were also reported in the memos to be running interference for Hughes in Washington. For example, Maheu reported on Hughes on June 28, 1968: "Howard Cannon called me this afternoon to inform that he and Senator Bible have

"A fascinating memo told of Hughes' plan to help elect Nixon in 1968."

been told all day long—by fellow senators—that they can depend on full support and assistance in sustaining their position that we obtain the Stardust . . . In the meantime, I've been in constant touch with George Frankling (then Las Vegas district attorney) and Gov. (Paul) Laxalt, and they are both ready to challenge the Justice Department single-handedly."

The memos indicate that Laxalt, while he was governor of Nevada, was deeply involved in helping Hughes acquire some of the state's most glamorous gambling palaces. Even the head of the FBI in Las Vegas, Harold "Red" Campbell, was pressed into assisting Hughes with his acquisitions, according to the memos. Laxalt told us he considered Hughes' involvement in Nevada to be "healthy." Campbell never returned our calls.

Perhaps the most fascinating memo told of Hughes' plan to help elect Nixon as President in 1968, then to groom Laxalt for the White House. The fabulously rich recluse saw a Kennedy-like quality

in Laxalt who, instead of seeking higher office, retired from politics in 1971.

"I want you," Hughes instructed Maheu, "to go see Nixon as my special confidential emissary. I feel there is a really valid possibility of a Republican victory this year. If that could be realized under our sponsorship and supervision every inch of the way, then we would be ready to follow with Laxalt as our next candidate."

As far back as Aug. 6, 1971, we reported that Hughes had sent \$100,000 to Nixon during the 1968 campaign. The cash was taken from the profits of the Silver Slipper, a gambling casino, which Hughes owned as a personal holding. The money, therefore, didn't pass through his corporate books. During his Las Vegas days, Hughes channeled money from the Silver Slipper to a number of politicians.

Of all Hughes' many battles, the biggest was fought with the Atomic Energy Commission. He desperately wanted to stop the testing in Nevada because of the radiation hazard and the threat to his Las Vegas interests. "How," he wrote, "can we expect to realize our full potential as a resort if we are scaring people away with bomb-tests and earth-quakes (sic)? And, if anybody doubts that people were scared during the earthquake, he should just read the newspaper where the incoming calls were listed immediately following the quake. There was an absolute avalanche of protests received by the newspapers, and they all centered around one reaction—fear . . . I don't think fear has any place in a resort . . ."

The billionaire hoped to use Humphrey, then Vice President, to stop the nuclear testing. "Bob," Hughes wrote Maheu, "there is one man who can accomplish our objective through (Lyndon) Johnson—and that man is H.H.H." Hughes wanted Maheu to offer "full unlimited support for his campaign to enter the White House if he will just take this one on for us . . ." Bob, I leave this whole campaign in your hands. I am sure you should personally go to the White House after we have obtained the 90-day and endeavor to sell the President on a permanent policy. I am sure H.H.H. would be glad to go with you and set up the appointment."