

Bell Sees 'Con Artists' At Work in Vesco Case

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By Charles R. Babcock
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Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said yesterday that "the White House is under attack by con artists" in the case of alleged influence-peddling by associates of fugitive businessman Robert Vesco.

Bell made the comments to reporters after a Senate hearing, when he said he was inclined to make a public report on the current Justice Department investigation of the apparent attempt to gain White House help for Vesco's legal problems.

"When the White House is under attack by con artists I think something ought to be said," Bell said. He declined to say who he feels the "con artists" are. "Make your own list," he said.

Aides insisted later that Bell's comments were not intended to prejudice the case. "He doesn't know where the investigation is," spokesman Terry Adamson said.

Bell has, however, been in almost daily communication with Charles Kirbo, a former law partner in Atlanta, who was contacted by the associates of Vesco.

Adamson said that the attorney general has passed on information from Kirbo—who is conducting his own investigation of Anderson's documentation—to the Criminal Division.

Criminal Division and head of the Justice investigation, said in a brief interview yesterday that he has not briefed Bell at all on the conduct of the investigation. "It was at his [Bell's] request,

He asked to be kept out of it," Heymann said.

Asked about Bell's passing on information from Kirbo, Heymann said, "I don't see anything wrong with a one-way flow like that. It's a two-way flow (back to Bell) I'd be worried about. And we don't have that."

The department investigation is checking reports that R.L. Herring, an Albany, Ga., businessman, hired attorney W. Spencer Lee IV to approach his hometown friend, top White House aide Hamilton Jordan, on Vesco's behalf.

Lee has acknowledged talking about the Vesco plan with Richard Harden, another Albany friend and White House aide. But Lee said he then backed out of the deal.

Harden has said he then told President Carter about the proposed scheme. And the White House disclosed last week that the president then sent Bell a cryptic note, telling him to see Lee, but not mentioning Vesco.

Herring is on trial on unrelated federal fraud and racketeering charges. And columnist Jack Anderson said in a column yesterday that a group of Herring associates had "reconstructed" from memory "lost" documents that implicate Jordan and Kirbo in the scheme.

Kirbo has told reporters—and apparently Bell too—that he can show that Anderson's key evidence is fraudulent.

Vesco has been a fugitive in Costa Rica, and more recently in the Bahamas, from federal charges that he stole millions of dollars from a corporation and then tried to buy his way



ROBERT VESCO
... fugitive from federal charges

out of trouble by giving a \$200,000 contribution to the Nixon campaign in 1972.

The latest allegations center on his alleged effort to use the Herring-Lee group in Georgia to intervene with the Carter administration to fix his legal problems.