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Strauss Case Held Unlikely Due to Time

The Watergate special prosecutor's investigating into an alleged campaign reporting violation by Democratic National Committee Chairman Robert S. Strauss apparently has been short-circuited by a provision of the new federal campaign law shortening the time during which charges can be brought.

A spokesman for the special prosecutor's office declined to discuss specific cases but said that investigations of 1972 cases are continuing.

Strauss has said publicly that he may have committed a "technical" violation of the federal Corrupt Practices Act in 1970 and 1971, when he was party treasurer, by failing to report the names of donors who gave two cash contributions totaling \$50,000.

Strauss said the donations, arranged by top executives of Ashland Oil Inc. of Kentucky, were represented to him as being from individuals. The oil company has admitted in court that the contributions were an illegal corporate gift.

The Corrupt Practices Act, which was in force at the time, required the listing of names and addresses of donors who contributed more than \$1000. Strauss listed the contributions as "miscellaneous."

The new federal law that went into effect Jan. 1, however, shortened the statute of limitations for campaign violations from five to three years and applied the shorter time span retroactively.

The special prosecutor's office originally maintained the shorter statute of limitations did not apply to the reporting provisions of the old law, but it asked the Justice Department for an opinion on the scope of the new law.

Although the department has not given a formal answer yet, the special prosecutor's office expects to be told that the shorter time for prosecution also applies to the reporting provisions of the old law — thereby foreclosing any prosecution of Strauss, if warranted, because the alleged violations occurred in 1970 and 1971.