

D.C. Attorney Denies Plea To Ford on Mandel Retrial

By Charles R. Babcock
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A Washington attorney close to President Gerald R. Ford denied published reports yesterday that he asked the White House to intervene to stop the retrial of Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel on political corruption charges.

Benton Becker, the lawyer who helped arrange the pardon of President Richard M. Nixon, was reported in a syndicated column by Jack Anderson to have asked President Ford and White House counsel Philip Buchen last month about the possibility of allowing Mandel to plead guilty to a minor offense and resign from office.

Becker, who is deputy council of the Republican National Committee, confirmed yesterday that he did mention the Mandel mistrial in meetings with the President and Buchen in December. "But I mentioned it in passing," he said. "I wasn't asking for anything. I said nothing about plea bargaining. It was just a conversation about the news of the day. It couldn't have

lasted 50 seconds. I don't even know Marvin Mandel."

Mandel and four friends were on trial on mail fraud and racketeering charges when publicity about jury tampering attempts forced the presiding judge to declare a mistrial on Dec. 3. A retrial is set for April 13.

Mandel and his attorney, Arnold Weiner, issued statements yesterday denying any knowledge of the alleged approaches by Becker.

"I will not barter or beg," Mandel said in remarks added to the text of his state of the state message. "I will not petition or grovel. I will fight for my freedom and my honor with every physical and financial resource I have."

The Anderson column was scheduled for publication Friday, but The Baltimore News-American published parts of it yesterday.

Others involved gave conflicting versions yesterday about the authenticity of the Anderson report. Anderson and his colleague, Les Whitten, had confirmed Becker's White House "approaches" through the president's press secretary, Ron Nessen.