

GM Chief Called to Quiz On Probe of Auto Critic

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By Richard Harwood
Washington Post Staff Writer

The President of General Motors Corp., a major Washington law firm, and several private detective agencies became the objects yesterday of an upcoming Senate investigation into the alleged "harassment" of Ralph Nader, a popular critic of unsafe cars.

Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.) scheduled hearings into the Nader affair by a Judiciary Subcommittee on March 22 and invited GM President James M. Roche to appear, along with private detectives reportedly employed by the company to look into Nader's background.

GM officials responded to Ribicoff's invitation by agreeing to co-operate with the subcommittee.

Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) said he hoped the Ribicoff Subcommittee would also determine if the Washington law firm, Alvord & Alvord, was in contempt of Congress for directing the Nader investigation at GM's behest.

GM admitted late Wednesday that it had employed Alvord & Alvord to investigate Nader following his repeated criticisms—in a book, in public appearances and as a Congressional witness — of GM's Corvair, a rear-engine compact.

Nader has called 1960 through 1963 models of the car a "hazardous vehicle" which represents "a constant danger to (its) occupants and the occupants of other cars which are exposed to the Corvair's rear-end breakaway tendencies."

He charged recently that for many weeks he had been subjected to an intensive investigation by unknown adversaries who had inquired into his sex life, his political and religious beliefs, as well as his professional competence.

Last weekend GM denied any connection with the Nader investigation. But Wednesday it confirmed that a "routine" investigation was being made to determine if Nader represented clients or lawyers involved in lawsuits against GM arising out of Corvair accidents.

Nader yesterday denied any connection with the GM lawsuits and resumed his attack on the Corvair and the company's "invasion" of his privacy.

"The corporate shield," said Nader, "cannot protect General Motors management from responsibility for the excesses indulged in by the private investigators which they hire . . . Is it 'routine' for General Motors to hire detectives to ask about one's sex life, religious practices, political affiliations and credit ratings? Is it routine for GM agents to solicit information from a professor of law at Harvard and other associates of mine on the wholly false pretext that I was being considered for a 'lucrative research job'? Against such a faceless and privileged prober, who knows what other invasions of privacy have occurred which cannot be detected by an individual who becomes the target of such abusive assaults?"

Ribicoff entered the controversy this week because Nader had been a witness before his subcommittee, which is concerned with automobile safety.

"The safety of the American driving public," he said, "is the basic issue before the committee. To this, must now be added the additional issue of a witness's right to testify before a committee of the United States Congress without fear of character assassination or intimidation."