

Watergate Probe Told Of Pressure for Funds

11/5/73 By Lawrence Meyer
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Two executives of American oil companies testified yesterday that they made illegal contributions from corporate funds to the Nixon re-election committee after campaign officials applied pressure for donations of \$100,000.

Both executives—Ashland Oil board chairman Orin E. Atkins and Gulf Oil Corporation vice president Claude C. Wild Jr.—said they were not asked specifically for corporate contributions. Both men said that corporate funds were the only realistic source for donations as large as \$100,000.

Both men testified before the Senate select Watergate committee that former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans, chief fund-raiser for the Nixon re-election cam-

paigned, told them he wanted them to give \$100,000.

In both instances, according to the testimony, foreign subsidiaries of the parent corporations were used in an effort to make sure that the cash contributions made to the Nixon re-election committee were not detected.

Both men testified that they were urged to make the contributions before April 7, 1972, so that the donation would not have to be reported. Under a new law that became effective on that date, the sources of contributions to candidates for federal office must be reported.

Wild and Atkins both had difficulty in explaining why

See HEARING, A13, Col. 1

HEARING, From A1

they made contributions that they indicated they did not wish to make. Neither man said he had been coerced or offered anything in return for the contribution.

Atkins, 49, a man with white hair who spoke with a soft Kentucky accent, told the committee that his firm, unlike the major American oil companies, relied on other companies for the crude oil that it refines and sells, primarily to independent oil and gasoline outlets.

"We were not seeking any particular privilege or benefit because we don't do any significant business with the government," Atkins said in explaining the contribution. "I think all we were attempting to do was to assure ourselves of a forum to be heard. Were we a larger factor in our respective industries, we can expect to have access to administrative officials in the executive branch

of government... with ease but being a relatively unknown corporation despite our size, we felt we needed something that would be sort of a calling card, something that would get us in the door and make our point of view heard."

Ashland, according to Atkins, is a Kentucky-based corporation that ranks about 70th in Fortune Magazine's list of the 500 largest American corporations.

Wild, 50-year-old vice president for government relations of Gulf Oil, indicated that his company's size—he said it was one of the nation's 10 largest with \$9 billion in sales in 1972—did not put Gulf in any better position with the federal government.

Explaining why he decided to make the contribution to the Nixon re-election campaign, Wild said, "I arrived at the decision that if we wanted to be, were going to be treated in an equal way... if there was not

some participation on my part or our part, we may be, you know, on what, whether you call it a blacklist or bottom of the totem pole, I would just like somebody to answer my telephone calls once in a while and that may not happen sometimes."

Atkins told the committee that Stans called him in early 1972 and during the brief conversation asked him to give \$100,000 to the campaign and to buy a \$10,000 ad in the Republican Convention brochure.

Stans made no comment about where the money should come from, Atkins said, "but in my own mind it could only have come from one place, from the corporation." Atkins said he discussed the matter with other company officials and then arranged to have \$100,000 drawn from a subsidiary, Ashland Oil Gabon, through a Swiss bank.

The money was delivered to Stans in a briefcase on about April 3, 1972, Atkins

said, by an Ashland official. The official, Atkins said, "reported to me that he delivered the funds to Mr. Stans and Mr. Stans took the briefcase and dumped it in his drawer and said, 'Thank you,' and the official left. I do not believe he was in Mr. Stans' office more than a minute or two."

In the spring of 1973, Atkins said, Stans tried to contact him to get a list of contributors for the \$100,000 contribution. Atkins said he did not discuss the matter with Stans because "I was not about to do what he wanted us to do."

In July, 1973, Atkins said he received a letter from Kenneth Wells Parkinson, lawyer for the Nixon finance committee, advising him that the \$100,000 contribution would have to be disclosed as part of the committee's settlement of a pending law suit with Common Cause, a citizens' lobby. Parkinson's letter asked Atkins to confirm that he and

his wife were the source of the \$100,000.

Atkins testified that that information was incorrect and that he had not told that to the finance committee.

"I had assumed when I saw this letter that it must have come from President Nixon's Christmas card list," Atkins testified. "It had my home address on it, my wife's name on it. The only contacts I ever had with the committee were any contributions through the office and in the name of Ashland Oil. I just concluded when I saw it that, I guess you refer to it as Rose Mary's list, they must have picked it up and taken my home address off it." Rose Mary Woods is President Nixon's personal secretary.

Parkinson declined last night in a telephone inter-

view to reveal the source of the information that formed the basis of his July 9, 1973, letter to Atkins and his wife. Parkinson said that to reveal the source of the information in the letter, one of many written at the time in connection with disclosure of pre-April 7 contributions, would violate attorney-client privilege.

Atkins said he subsequently approached the office of the special Watergate prosecutor and revealed that he had made an illegal contribution. Ashland Oil Gabon pleaded guilty on Tuesday to a charge of making an illegal contribution and was fined \$5,000. Atkins said he pleaded no contest to a similar misdemeanor charge and was fined \$1,000. Atkins said that the Nixon re-election committee returned the \$100,000 contrib-

ution after Ashland requested a refund.

Gulf Oil Corp. also pleaded guilty on Tuesday to charges of making \$125,000 in illegal contributions — \$100,000 to the Nixon campaign, \$10,000 to Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) and \$15,000 to Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.). The pleas were the fifth and sixth guilty pleas by corporations that made illegal contributions to the Nixon campaign.

Wild, who testified he made the contributions without consulting anyone else at Gulf Oil, said he first tried to give only \$50,000 when first approached by Lee Nunn, a re-election committee official, who asked him for \$100,000. Nunn returned again later, Wild said, and asked for the other \$50,000.

Wild said he talked to

Stans who "indicated he was hopeful of obtaining \$100,000 from the large American corporations. Ours being one of the top 10, he hoped that we would participate."

Wild said he arranged for the donation through a Bahamian subsidiary of Gulf but did not tell Stans the money was corporate funds.

The hearings resume today at 10 a.m.