

Contributions costly for Ashland

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ashland Oil, Inc., of Kentucky was fined \$25,000 Monday on a second round of charges pegged to the firm's unlawful contributions to political candidates between 1970 and 1972.

Ashland pleaded guilty to each of five counts in a surprise information brought by the Watergate special prosecutor. Chief U.S. District Judge George L. Hart imposed the maximum \$5,000 fine on each of the charges, which involved a

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total of \$169,365 in corporate campaign gifts.

According to the prosecutor, \$50,000 was delivered in cash between June 1970 and February 1972 to Robert Strauss, then treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, for use by the party organization. Strauss is now the Democrats' national chairman.

The remainder of the funds went to various Senate and House candidates of both parties, including Sens. Hubert H.

Humphrey, D-Minn., and John Tower, R-Tex.

Unlike the custom in similar cases, neither the acting prosecutor, Thomas McBride, nor the paperwork he filed spelled out whether any of the recipients were aware that the contributions were unlawful.

Strauss told reporters, however, that "the record clearly reflects that there was no knowledge on the party of anyone at the DNC that these gifts were corporate. As a matter of fact, they were clearly represented as being the gifts of individual executives."

In some instances, the charges said, the contributions were indeed made by executives — who in turn were reimbursed by the oil company.

A spokesman for the prosecutor's office said the question of knowledge by the recipients was left unanswered largely because of the crush of time. A new, three-year statute of limitations — which could have precluded much of the case against Ashland — takes effect in just two days. The current limitation is five years.

"The investigation will continue to the extent the new statute allows," said spokesman James Doyle.

In 1973, Ashland was fined \$5,000 and its board chairman, Orin E. Atkins, \$1,000, after voluntarily disclosing that the firm had contributed \$100,000 to the re-election campaign of former President Richard M. Nixon.