

# Violations Found In 'News'



By  
**Mike Causey**  
*Per. 10/1/73*

General Accounting Office investigators have unearthed at least 10 violations of the federal antilobbying law by four major departments that have been supplying "canned" news items free to radio stations around the country.

The GAO report has been sent to Chairman Torbett H. MacDonald (D-Mass.) of the House Communications Subcommittee. He ordered the GAO probe after this column reported on May 10 of government-sponsored and taxpayer-financed news items supplied via telephone to low-budget radio stations.

Later columns pointed out that some of the "news" items appeared to violate the antilobbying law, and that some of the radio stations were airing the items as special reports from nonexistent news bureaus here, rather than as government news.

We also said some agencies had set up toll-free lines so that the radio stations could call long distance for free. GAO confirmed that four agencies—Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Cost of Living Council and the Environmental Protection Agency—spent more than \$100,000 a year of public funds for the "free" telephone news service.

GAO's investigation covered 10 of the 18 federal agencies that use the "spot master" telephone tape news system. It monitored news items used from Jan. 1 to May 31. GAO said there were 1,462 reports its investigators listened to. Another 62 news reports were "no longer available" from the agencies.

The probe found 10 violations of the law that prohibits agencies from using public funds to lobby for or against legislation before Congress. The 10 violations occurred in news reports put out by Transportation, HUD, Labor and Commerce.

GAO said the 10 radio reports

cited were "patently designed to influence the general public to contact members of Congress to urge the members to vote for or against (i.e. support or defeat) pending legislation."

Examples of the spot master news items which GAO found in violation of the antilobbying law include:

Federal railroad administrator, March 19—"If we are going to have economic stability and fiscal responsibility, we must all support the President's budget program—and let Congress know we support it."

Labor Department broadcast, April 5, with a "news" item relating to the occupational safety-health act: "... Those in Congress who resist this effort by calling for more federal outlays are asking the American workingman to bear the brunt of heavier taxes and renewed inflation. The public must let these big spenders know that it supports the President in the fight to hold down federal spending."

Commerce Department broadcast, March 21 and March 30: "The opposition to President Nixon's budget is not coming from the people. The people, as we have seen are benefiting from the largest human resources budget in our nation's history. The display of anguish originates from the poverty middleman.

"They see their roles as well-paid publicly financed advisers to the poor being diminished," the Commerce news broadcast said. "President Nixon has taken his stand. We have heard from those who oppose his effort. Now the people must make their choice, and they must make their choice known to their elected representatives in Congress."

The spot master radio "news" campaign was apparently a part of the "Battle of the Budget" fight, a White House attempt to mobilize the public relations apparatus of the bureaucracy to defeat 15 bills before Congress.

On April 4 this column reported that copies of a kit, telling federal speechwriters how to attack Congress, had been handed out to key government information officials. The kits told how anticongressional speeches, press release and radio reports were to be written and used. There was even a chapter called "Epithets for Congress" aimed at ridiculing "big spender" Democrats who disagreed with Mr. Nixon's budget priorities.

Sens. Edmund M. Muskie (D-Maine) and Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) asked GAO to investigate the "Battle of the Budget" kits. GAO reported

back that the kits were largely produced with funds from the Republican National Committee. While there were violations of the antilobbying act, GAO said it was up to the Justice Department to prosecute. Justice studied the situation—although officials said they did not see any of the 200 copies of the speech kit—and concluded no criminal action was necessary.

**Pay Raise:** The 4.77 per cent white collar-military pay raise is effective today, but won't show up in the checks of most employees until Oct. 14. A few workers will see first results of the new increase Oct. 7, depending on when their pay period begins. The increases do not affect wage board, postal workers or retirees.