

# Gibson naming mistake caused by Ford's haste

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Ford's admitted mistake in choosing a new head of the Federal Energy Administration resulted from haste and a failure to take normal precautions, according to public and private accounts by some of those involved.

Nobody at the White House was aware until after Ford named Andrew E. Gibson to the post that Gibson was getting \$88,000 a year from an oil transport firm he once headed.

That money, and questions about Gibson's role in the approval of multimillion-dollar subsidies for the same oil firm, quickly surfaced, scuttled Gibson's chances to win Senate confirmation and forced the withdrawal of his nomination.

"We made a mistake," Ford said at a news conference Thursday.

A White House subordinate, who asked not to be named, concurred. "We short-cut the system," he said. "The President wanted to move quickly."

Here is an account of how it happened, pieced together from public statements and off-the-record talks.

Ford was eager to oust John Sawhill, the head of the energy agency who was floating ideas Ford doesn't like, such as a high tax on gasoline.

Ford's talent scout, William N. Walker and his staff members drew three or four names from the talent pool and sent them to Ford without favoring one. Ford chose Gibson, announcing his appointment Oct. 29.

Gibson had been recommended to the White House for another government job. He has said he expected to be appointed to the International Labor Organization.

Ford says Gibson's name was chosen because he had a record as a good administrator.

Gibson was President Nixon's first Maritime Administrator. He held a high post in the Commerce Department until January 1973, when he left to become president of Interstate Oil Transport Co.

What Ford says he did not know is that Gibson had a \$1 million contract with Interstate, which was committed to pay him \$88,000 a year until 1984 even though he left after only 14 months on the job.

Taking such large sums of money from an oil-transport firm raised questions about Gibson's fitness to head the energy administration.

Gibson did mention to White House aides he was receiving money from the firm as part of a severance deal. But the information raised no alarm bells, one official said. Gibson wasn't pressed for details.

The White House, short on time, neglected to order the customary FBI check into Gibson's dealings.

Officials say it was not until nearly a week after the appointment had been announced that White House aides got full details of Gibson's \$1 million contract. Monday, Nov. 4, he supplied them with copies of it.

By that time Gibson's nomination already was in trouble. Nov. 4, Gibson volunteered the information to the Senate Interior Committee, which was to hold confirmation hearings.

Meanwhile, according to Senate sources, a remarkable number of rumors and tips about Gibson's alleged conflict-of-interest problems were reaching investigators for the Interior Committee.