

Campaign Aide Got High Level Help on Grant

By John Hanrahan

Washington Post Staff Writer

A firm headed by a Nixon campaign leader in Florida received a \$75,000 federal grant last year after a national official of President Nixon's re-election committee intervened with a presidential aide to have the grant application submitted from the White House.

The grant was approved seven weeks before the November election for a company whose president, Woodrow Page, said he ran the Nixon campaign for black voters in Jacksonville.

A memo obtained by The Washington Post, dated May 2, 1972, shows that the application went from Paul R. Jones, of the President re-election committee here, to White House aide Edwin L. Harper before ending up at the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE).

An OMBE spokesman said yesterday the application, which originally asked for \$185,000, was received at that agency on June 29.

The applicant, Gate City Advertising and Public Relations, Inc., received final approval for a \$75,000 grant on Sept. 20 from OMBE. Federal sources familiar with the contract said it was unusual and probably improper for the President's re-election unit to try to use the political weight of the White House to obtain a grant for a private firm.

All persons involved in the application or the memo who were contacted by The Post disclaimed any knowledge of any attempt to influence improperly the OMBE decision on the application.

One government source said the application lacked merit and would never have been funded without political intervention. Another source said the application may have had merit, but

that a memo forwarded from the White House probably would guarantee its approval merit or not.

Jones, at the time he sent the memo, was executive director of the black voters division of the Committee for the Re-election of the President. Harper at the time was a special assistant to the President as an assistant director of the Domestic Council. Both have since left those posts.

The memo, from Jones to Harper, states that it concerns a "Proposal Submitted for OMBE Funding." It goes on to say: "Please find enclosed a proposal for funding by the Office of Minority Business Enterprises..." It adds that the proposal is "For the establishment of a minority business services of Jacksonville," and names the Gate City firm as the applicant.

Harper said in a telephone interview that he does not recall the specific application. But he said it was likely Jones did send it to him. Harper said if he did receive it, "my policy would have been to send it to the appropriate agency and would have said 'for your consideration' period. I never made any recommendation."

Asked if the forwarding of an application by the White House might be interpreted by the receiving agency as an endorsement of the application, Harper said: "That was not my intention."

Harper said he "really couldn't speculate" as to why Jones had sent him the application. He said he knows Jones socially, but did not recall ever discussing the Gate City application with him. He said no one else asked him to intervene on the application, either.

Private applicants often sent proposals to the White House, Harper said, "and I just forwarded them to the appropriate agencies." But, in those instances, he said, the applications came directly from the applicant

and were not funneled through any middle-man or organization such as the re-election committee.

He said he could recall only one application ever coming to him through Jones and that if he received others from other persons on the re-election committee, "it happened very, very rarely."

Repeated efforts over the week to reach Jones failed. Neither the re-election committee, the White House nor acquaintances of Jones said they had a forwarding phone number or address for him.

Page, who received the grant, said in a telephone interview that he knows Jones but that "I never talked to him about this application" or asked him to send a memo to the White House.

Page also said he had not discussed the application with anyone at the White House or at the Re-election committee. Page and Harper both said they do not know each other.

Page said the application, as far as he knew, "went straight to the Commerce Department" in which the OMBE is located. He said he did not know why Jones had involved himself in the application.

"Maybe he thought it would win black votes," Page said. "They (the re-election committee) were apparently doing a lot of things. How do I know why he did it?" Page also suggested that the memo might be phony. A government source said the memo was still in the OMBE files late last week.

Page downplayed his own role in the Nixon campaign, saying that white Republican leaders locally "hardly ever provided us with the materials we needed." He said that the \$75,000 grant was being used for what it was intended—to counsel and provide technical services to several hundred minority businesses in Jacksonville.