

Office of Education Scored On Contract Involving Hunt

By Eric Wentworth

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Rep. Edith Green (D-Ore.) said yesterday that the U.S. Office of Education bought itself a "political headache" last June by renewing a public relations contract involving Watergate figure E. Howard Hunt Jr.

In a House floor speech, Mrs. Green said an Office of Education contract review board approved the renewal at its June 21 meeting despite knowing of Hunt's being implicated in the Watergate case, and despite lack of competitive bidding and the absence of contract documents.

The contract with Robert R. Mullen and Co., dating back to 1969 reportedly before Hunt joined that public relations firm, carries a cumulative price tag of nearly \$750,000. The Mullen firm's major mission has been to stimulate public interest in educating handicapped children.

Office of Education officials recalled that Hunt served, in effect, as account executive for the government contract. He was instrumental early last year in securing Julie Nixon Eisenhower's appearance in a television spot on behalf of the educating-the-handicapped campaign, at a time when he was also serving as a part-time White House consultant.

Mrs. Green, a longtime critic of mismanagement and waste in the office's spending of grant and contract funds, said the agency "has again asked for its political headache and deserves no sympathy

because of the irresponsible manner in which it continues to spend taxpayers' dollars in questionable ways while school districts are desperate for funds to continue basic programs."

Mrs. Green said Hunt's name had been linked with the Watergate bugging case the day before the Sole Source Board—the Office of Education panel created to screen proposed contracts that had not been subject to competitive bids—approved continuing the Mullen contract.

Indeed, she said, she had been informed that Hunt's name and the Watergate case had been discussed at the board's meeting. "It was suggested at the meeting," she continued, "that approval of this sole source contract could prove to be an embarrassment to the administration. Nevertheless, the continuing contract was funded."

Mrs. Green added that a government audit on an earlier phase of the contract with Mullen had challenged certain costs totaling \$34,472—including excessive costs for producing a film strip.

Minutes of the board meeting that day, the Oregon lawmaker said, indicated the panel approved continuing the Mullen contract despite the absence of a contract proposal and related paperwork. Office of Education files showed Mullen had submitted a proposal and budget earlier—but confirmed this material was not at the board's meeting.

Eswin W. Martin, associate

commissioner of the Office of Education in charge of its handicapped-education bureau, said in response to questions that he and others had been generally pleased with the quality of the Mullen firm's work.

Martin denied Mrs. Green's further assertion that a factor in continuing the contract presumably was Hunt's and Mullen's White House influence "vis-a-vis funds for OE's handicapped budget."