

Stans
8/24/72 ✓

The Watergate Caper (Cont.)

There is something disquieting about the decision of the General Accounting Office to delay issuance of its audit report on the finances of the Nixon re-election committee until Finance Director Maurice Stans and GOP bigwigs have a chance to examine and offer suggestions about the 8-page document.

The GAO, after all, works for the Congress of the United States and not for the executive branch of this or any administration. It may be true, as aides of Comptroller General Elmer Staats say, that it is standard operating procedure for the GAO to show investigative reports to the investigated agencies unless some member of Congress specifies that this not be done.

But the GAO is working with a new Federal Election Campaign Act that did not become effective until April 7 and, beyond this, the Committee for Re-election of the President is not an "agency" in the sense that the Pentagon or the Peace Corps are.

There is a strong instinct to suppose

that Stans' phone calls to GAO officials an hour before scheduled release of the audit report caused Staats to delay public disclosure of a matter that is central to the Watergate bugging of the Democratic National Committee in which CRP people are suspect. If it is routine to submit audit reports to investigated agencies, why was the submission not made until after Stans had called GAO at least twice?

The GAO, like all investigative agencies, must be like Caesar's wife in irreproachability. We cannot take kindly to the spectacle of GAO officials sitting down with GOP campaign leaders in Miami Beach to edit, check, delete from or add to a report that should be based only on documents the committee is bound by law to have submitted long since.

We believe Stans has even more to explain now than he did before about how GOP campaign funds were used and now the GAO, a watchdog agency, has created the appearance of evil if not evil itself.