

Smear Of Rocky Is Seen

terHorst Cites 'Right-Wing Extremists'

By Stuart Auerbach
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Right-wing "extremists" tried to smear Nelson A. Rockefeller but their allegations were unfounded and the former New York governor remains a candidate for Vice President, the White House said yesterday.

"President Ford has advised me that Gov. Rockefeller has been and remains under consideration for the vice presidential nomination," press secretary J. F. terHorst told reporters.

The statement followed what terHorst called "an attempt by an extremist group to discredit Gov. Rockefeller" and link his campaign contributions to political dirty tricks.

Ter Horst reported that a man who called himself "Mr. Long" last Sunday contacted Philip W. Buchen, then a member of the President's transition team and now the newly appointed White House counsel, with information that papers belonging to Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt Jr. had been copied before they were destroyed.

These papers, "Long" told Buchen first on the phone and then in a face-to-face interview in the Executive Office Building, showed that Rockefeller money was earmarked to hire thugs to disrupt the 1972 Democratic National Convention, a White House source reported.

The Chicago Tribune reported yesterday that these papers were also supposed to link former Attorney General John N. Mitchell with organized crime in New York.

An independent check by another lawyer on the transition team indicated that the Hunt papers "might indeed exist," a White House source said. Buchen reported his findings to Mr. Ford, who directed that the information be turned

over to the office of Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

The prosecutor's office representatives late Friday opened two safe deposit boxes in an unnamed bank in an unnamed city that were supposed to contain Hunt's papers.

"The search of the boxes found nothing whatsoever," terHorst reported, and therefore the special prosecutor's office "considers the matter completely closed."

"It would appear on the basis of the special prosecutor's office report that the original information given Mr. Buchen was without foundation," terHorst continued.

"Any allegations made about Mr. Rockefeller or Mr. Mitchell to Mr. Buchen by the unidentified tipster would appear to me to be without foundation."

Nevertheless, speculation continued about Rockefeller's position as a contender for the vice presidency—especially

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when terHorst said that Mr. Ford would have announced his choice without waiting for the special prosecutor's report as to whether or not Rockefeller was involved in campaign dirty tricks.

"This matter should have no bearing on President Ford's vice presidential nominee," terHorst said in one attempt to clear up the confusion.

Later, in his third news briefing of the day, he came back with Mr. Ford's statement clearly leaving Rockefeller among the contenders.

"The President," terHorst said, "regards the inaccurate information given to Mr. Buchen on Sunday, Aug. 11, as a deplorable example of the lengths to which certain persons will go to discredit Mr. Rockefeller and thereby attempt to remove him from consideration."

terHorst added: "What's been going on in the last week or so is a grave effort on the part of supporters of persons deemed to be under Mr. Ford's consideration (for the vice presidential nomination) to influence his choice."

terHorst said, however, that this type of campaigning falls within the legitimate political arena and was quite different from the attempt to smear Rockefeller.

A White House official, who asked that he not be identified, said the "extremists" were not a known formal organization, but "a group of right-wing extremists who decided it would be useful to blacken the name of Gov. Rockefeller."

The infighting among Republicans has been sharp since Aug. 6, when it became apparent that President Nixon would resign.

Rockefeller was one of the first men named as being under consideration, but some members of the conservative bloc of the Republican Party

indicated that they opposed him. Another prime candidate is GOP National Chairman George Bush. But two Republican sources on Capitol Hill told The Associated Press yesterday that neither man is likely to get the job.

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terHorst said, "There is no clear indication that those responsible (for the Rockefeller smear attempt) were connected in any way with one of the other men said to be under consideration for Vice President, and the real identity of the tipster, Long, is still unknown."

In Seal Harbor, Maine, where Rockefeller is vacationing, spokesman Hugh Morrow said, "Members of the Rockefeller family, including the governor, contributed to the 1972 Republican presidential campaign only after three months of negotiations produced an assurance that all funds from the Rockefellers would be used only in New York State under the supervision of R. Burdell Bixby, our own state campaign manager."

The Hunt papers have long been an enigma in the Watergate case. Hunt is supposed to have turned over to a friend to be destroyed what some sources believe are about 7,000 documents packed in seven boxes.

There have been recurrent rumors that the papers either were not destroyed or that they were copied before they were destroyed.

terHorst said that Mr. Ford would nominate his Vice President either Tuesday or Wednesday. The announcement was slated for last week, but was postponed because the President was tied up with the Cyprus crisis.

Mr. Ford's vice presidential nominee will have to undergo extensive hearings in both houses of Congress.