

\$500,000 Gift By Rocky to Aide Reported

By William Greider
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Vice President-designate Nelson A. Rockefeller reportedly gave more than \$500,000 in gifts to his close adviser, William J. Ronan, who is now chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, it was learned yesterday.

Rockefeller's press secretary, Hugh Morrow, refused to confirm the amount of the Ronan gift, but he did acknowledge a gift of \$100,000 which he received himself from Rockefeller earlier this year.

According to reliable sources, Rockefeller reported in confidential tax returns submitted for his confirmation hearings a series of gifts he made to former and present aides and other public officials. Last week it was learned that he gave \$50,000 to Henry A. Kissinger in 1969 and \$86,000 to L. Judson Morhouse, former New York Republican chairman.

When Morrow confirmed the Kissinger and Morhouse gifts last weekend, he mentioned that a third one had gone to Ronan, but declined to reveal the amount.

Ronan, who could not be reached for comment yesterday, was Rockefeller's close adviser in Albany when Rockefeller was governor and Ronan became the first chairman of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, a super-agency which Rockefeller created. Last spring, he resigned from the MTA and became chairman of the Port Authority. He also serves as a senior adviser to the Rockefeller family and is a trustee of the New York State Power Authority.

Rep. Edward Mezvinsky (D-Iowa), who serves on the House Judiciary Committee, yesterday called on Rockefeller to make public all of his tax records before the House committee holds its confirmation hearings next month.

In a telegram to Rockefeller, Mezvinsky noted that the vice presidential nominee had promptly confirmed the Kissinger and Morhouse gifts, but declined to be specific about the Ronan gift's amount.

"Considering the influence Dr. Ronan wields as chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey," the

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congressman said, "this contrasting lack of candor can only serve to generate suspicion about this gift."

While refusing to reveal the size of it, Morrow said the gift to Ronan was an act of "friendship and the governor's desire to help keep a good man in government." The Rockefeller spokesman did confirm that the gift was made in the spring of this year after Ronan left the MTA and before he was appointed to head the Port Authority. There has been no question about the legality of the gifts and Rockefeller reported that he paid taxes on the gifts.

As for his own gift, Morrow said then-Gov. Rockefeller heard from friends that Morrow was in financial difficulties because of two catastrophic illnesses in his family.

"He paid off a bank note for me after I left the state payroll earlier this year," said Morrow, who continued to work for Rockefeller in private life. "Again, I don't think the matter has any bearing on Nelson Rockefeller's qualifications to be vice president."

Morrow said he had borrowed money at the bank.

I was being pressed for payment. I didn't go to him. He heard about it and made a gift. That was it."

According to other sources, Morrow received other gifts in previous years while he was working for Rockefeller in Albany.

The Ronan gift pose somewhat different questions for the House and Senate committees that must pass on Rockefeller's nomination to be vice president. The Port Authority that Ronan heads is a major public agency governing roads, bridges and tunnels and, among other things, it issues public bonds on which the Rockefeller family bank, Chase Manhattan, might be a bidder.

At a press conference yesterday, Kissinger provided further details on the \$50,000 he received from Rockefeller in 1969 upon entering White House service as President Nixon's foreign policy adviser. Kissinger, who served as a Rockefeller consulatnt for many years before that, said he submitted the question of the gift to Mr. Nixon's lawyers before accepting it.

An opinion clearing the gift was written by Egil Krogh Jr. and Edward L. Morgan, who signed themselves as deputy counsel, though their letter of approval was written five days before the Nixon inaugural.

Krogh and Morgan declared: "Based upon the philanthropic nature of the Rockefellers and expressly upon the fact that the contemplated gift of money to you is based only upon your close personal friendship and is a direct result of not only that friendship but high personal esteem in which they hold you, we find that such a gift would not violate either the statutes, executive order or regulations involving conflict of interests."

Kissinger, who said he put the money in trust for his children, also released a "Dear Henry" letter from Rockefeller, dated Jan. 17, 1969, which praised Kissinger's work in formulating foreign policy.

"As a token of my friendship and my appreciation for the work you have done in service to the people of this country," Rockefeller wrote, "I am arranging to have a gift made to you in the amount of \$50,000. It comes from Happy and me, with our warmest best wishes."