

Cover-up Scandal Brewing in Dallas

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

Another cover-up scandal is brewing behind the closed doors of a federal grand jury in Dallas.

It has some of the ingredients of the Watergate scandal, beginning with a bungled wiretap attempt. The wiretapper was caught on Jan. 16, 1970, and his trail led to oil billionaire Nelson Bunker Hunt. Thereafter, pressure allegedly was brought to keep Hunt's name out of the scandal.

Because the case has dragged on for years and powerful people have intervened in Hunt's behalf, we began checking into the secret grand jury proceedings. We have spent several weeks interviewing witnesses in Washington and Texas. We have read through thousands of pages of evidence, including sealed court documents, bank records and private papers.

One charge is that the Senate's owlish, old president pro tempore, James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), may have "received a \$50,000 to \$60,000 payoff" to intervene with the Justice Department in Hunt's behalf. The charge has been denied by the senator.

Eastland not only is the Senate's senior member, he is also chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which gives him enormous power over the Justice Department.

Hunt allegedly came to him for help in the wiretap case. The senator, it is alleged, called Richard G. Kleindienst, then the deputy attorney general. He, in turn, allegedly asked the head of the Criminal Division, Henry Petersen, about Hunt's involvement.

Petersen is alleged to have reported back to Kleindienst that both Bunker Hunt and his brother, Herbert, probably would be indicted. Kleindienst is said to have passed this information to Eastland, who notified Bunker Hunt.

After Eastland's inquiry, Justice stalled the case. But in 1973, the department realized the lid was about to blow and had the Hunt brothers indicted.

A potential witness against them was the wiretapper, Patrick McCann, who already had been jailed on the wiretap charge. On Jan. 8, 1974, Hunt urged Eastland to inquire about the possibility of a parole for McCann.

"I have been told," the billionaire wrote, "it is not out of or-

der for an inquiry to be made . . ." of Federal Parole Board Chairman Maurice Sigler.

The Federal Parole Board, it happens, also comes under Eastland's sway as Senate Judiciary chairman. Not long after Hunt requested it, the senator's administrative assistant, Courtney Pace, contacted the board about a parole for McCann.

On Jan. 14, 1974, a "Dear Bunker" letter was mailed to Hunt, over Eastland's signature, advising him that the contact with the parole board had been made.

McCann, meanwhile, is alleged to have been told that Bunker Hunt had paid off Eastland to arrange the parole. McCann got this impression, according to sworn testimony, through John Curington, a close and trusted assistant to Hunt's father, the late H. L. Hunt.

Asked under oath whether Hunt had slipped any cash to Eastland, the wiretapper testified: "If it was, it wasn't but \$50,000 or \$60,000. It was tiny compared to everything else."

An attorney in the case, Jerry Patchen, testified "that Sen. Eastland received a \$50,000 to \$60,000 payoff." At another point in the testimony, Patchen said: "I've also heard that there

was a cattle deal involved with Eastland."

The lawyer noted "that Eastland sent a letter to the parole board of McCann's behalf, which is kind of unusual for a Mississippi senator to send a letter for a Texas wiretapper who he has never met."

Eastland flatly denied that he had received any money from Hunt. The billionaire, although a close friend, hadn't even contributed to his campaign, Eastland told us.

The senator acknowledged that he had called Kleindienst but insisted he had asked nothing but "a square deal" for Hunt. "They will tell anybody," said Eastland, "if they are under investigation."

The contact with the parole board, said the senator, was news to him. His administrative assistant also told us the letter about the parole, though it bore Eastland's signature, had gone out without the senator's seeing it.

A spokesman for Hunt joined in denying the charge that the billionaire had paid off Eastland. It would be unthinkable, the spokesman said, for money to pass between two close friends.