

Nixon Aide Denies Influence Attempt

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

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WASHINGTON, June 26 — Harry S. Dent, a special counsel to President Nixon, denied today that he was attempting to solicit business for his brother's housing company in South Carolina when he wrote letters on White House stationery to Negroes in the state.

Mr. Dent, a 40-year-old political adviser to the President, depicted the letter-writing as an attempt to counter the "false impression" that the Nixon Administration was opposed to Federal low-income housing assistance.

"You have to understand that Southern Democrats have had the black vote sewed up," Mr. Dent said in an interview. "They've used the Federal programs to do it."

He confirmed a report, published today in The Washington Post, that he had written about 12 letters to Negroes who had been approached by his brother, Billy Dent, to find potential customers for St. Matthews Builders of St. Matthews, S. C.

Denies Aiding Brother

But the White House aide said there was no intention on his part to help his brother sell houses.

"I just wouldn't do that kind of thing," he said. "I have better sense than that."

Each letter, mailed in April, contained the following message:

"My brother Billy Dent has spoken very highly of you and your interest in President Nixon's effort to make more low-cost homes available to all our people who are interested in being able to buy and own a home of their own.

"Be assured this is one of the President's most important aims. He realizes the value of home ownership for all citizens."

Mr. Dent said he had made a similar point in discussions with Republican leaders of other Southern states, stressing the importance of convincing Negro voters that the Nixon Administration was identified with Federal housing programs.

Cites Lack of Names

Mr. Dent was asked why, if his intention had been to wean Southern Negroes away from the Democratic party, the letters had gone only to individuals associated with his brother in South Carolina. He replied that no one else had provided him with any names.

"If I had names I would write to them today, unless somebody told me not to," Mr. Dent said.

He added later that, before



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Harry S. Dent

writing any more letters, he would "inquire about it" and said that the White House had not raised any objections after the reports of his activities were published.

In San Clemente, Calif., where Mr. Nixon is working at his Western White House, a Presidential spokesman declined to say whether the Administration regarded Mr. Dent's letters as an impropriety.

Gerald Warren, deputy White House press secretary, said that he did not have "full details" about the matter. The only information he had, Mr. Warren said, was Mr. Dent's assurance that the letters had gone to "persons who could help explain low-cost housing programs to others."

Mr. Dent said that the individuals to whom he has written were not buyers of homes from his brother, who formed the company specializing in federally assisted housing shortly after the 1968 election.

Brother Disputes Report

Billy Dent, who is 48, said in a telephone interview that he had not attempted to trade on his brother's White House position.

He disputed the published report that he had suggested, in meetings with prospective purchasers, that he "had help" in Washington to process applications for Federal mortgage peting companies could.

Billy Dent said that he was "very proud" of his younger brother. He said that at meetings he would introduce himself and add that people should

not "get me mixed up with Harry Dent he's my brother in Washington."

He said that he would often wind up "bragging two or three times on President Nixon's Administration" when talking with Negroes because "anything I can do to help him gets votes I do."

Billy Dent said that he had not sought any help from his brother in the White House "because we don't need help."

Chief Source of Income

He said later, however, that his primary source of income was an insurance business. He added that his housing company "has a potential, but it hasn't bloomed." He said that he paid anywhere from \$50 to \$200 a month in bank charges for over-drawing on his checking account.

Billy Dent said that he was neither a Democrat nor a Republican but that he thought his brother Harry, a former chairman of the Republican party in South Carolina and now the Nixon Administration's chief political operative for Southern and Border states, "should be crowing" about the White House support of housing assistance for the poor. He said he had given his brother "thousands of names" of individuals he could get in touch with.

Although Harry Dent said, and the White House repeated, that none of those to whom he had written were purchasers of houses from Billy Dent, The Washington Post reported today that recipients of the letters had been approached to find customers among Negroes in their communities.

Says He Set Up Meeting

One recipient, Herman Vaughan of Sumter, S.C., said he had arranged a meeting at which Billy Dent had told prospective buyers "he had help in Washington." The Post reported.

Billy Dent contended today, "When I say I have influence in Washington, I refer to our Senators and our House members."

"The only thing I deal with Harry on is politics," he added.

Harry Dent, a former administrative assistant to Senator Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina, is regarded in Washington as a leading figure in a Nixon Administration "Southern strategy."

This strategy, the existence of which the White House has disputed, is said to involve the Republican party's writing off of the votes of Negroes and Northern liberals.