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Bebe Rebozo Joins White House 'Plot'



— Jack Anderson

NOT LONG AFTER Bebe Rebozo took a \$100,000 cash gift intended for President Nixon from industrialist Howard Hughes, the President's friend joined in a White House plot to link Hughes to the Democrats.

This amazing double-cross is revealed in confidential White House memos.

The memos show that in January 1971, White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman sought to plant stories in the press tying the eccentric Hughes to Democratic national chairman Larry O'Brien.

Rebozo was careful to request that he be kept informed "if any action be taken with regard to Hughes" because of "his own dealings with the Hughes people."

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BOTH HALDEMAN and White House counsel John Dean, therefore, knew of Rebozo's dealings with Hughes, although the memos don't make clear whether they were aware the billionaire had slipped Rebozo \$100,000 for the President.

Haldeman decided, nevertheless, to go ahead with the plot even if it meant "embarrassing" Hughes. Haldeman instructed Dean, however, to keep "Bebe out of it at all costs."

Haldeman asked Dean in a memo, dated January 18, 1971, to begin "an inquiry into the relationship between Larry O'Brien and Howard Hughes."

Dean reported back his "preliminary findings" on January 26, 1971.

"I discussed the matter with Bebe Rebozo who indicated that his information regarding (a retainer paid by Hughes to O'Brien) had come from Robert Maheu,

the recently released head of Hughes' Nevada operation," reported Dean.

Dean also reported that Robert Bennett, son of Senator Wallace Bennett, (Rep.-Utah), represented Hughes. "Bennett informs me," wrote Dean, "that there is no doubt about the fact that Larry O'Brien was retained by Howard Hughes and the contract is still in existence . . ."

Two days after receiving Dean's report, Haldeman sent him confidential instructions.

"You should continue to keep in contact with Bob Bennett, as well as looking for other sources of information on this subject," Haldeman directed. "Once Bennett gets back to you with his final report, you and Chuck Colson should get together and come up with a way to leak the appropriate information."

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AS IT HAPPENED, we were the recipients of the White House leak. We reported on August 6, 1971, that "Hughes' lieutenants offered to subsidize Larry O'Brien so he could serve without pay as Democratic national chairman during the 1968 campaign."

We quoted O'Brien who acknowledged he had been "sounded out by Maheu in 1968" but insisted he "never drew a dime from the Hughes interests during the campaign." Several months later, we reported, O'Brien was retained by Hughes.

We have spoken to O'Brien again for an updated comment. O'Brien said his fee was "a personal matter between me and my clients." But in a letter to Maheu, dated August 21, 1968, O'Brien said his "annual fee would be \$180,000, payable in monthly installments."