

Pro-Nixon Letter Was Colson's Idea

Washington

A letter praising President Nixon's Vietnam policies—signed by the U.S. ambassador to Britain, printed on State Department letterhead and mailed at taxpayer expense across the country in February—was traced yesterday to Charles Colson, a former close Nixon aide.

The State Department said it found out after an inquiry that Walter Annenberg, U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James, wrote the letter praising Mr. Nixon's "strong but quiet leadership" at the request of Colson. Colson, who at the time was special counsel to Mr. Nixon, then arranged for its distribution by government frank.

The department said Annenberg at first claimed he decided to send out the letter, but after further inquiries acknowledged it was Colson's idea.

Senator Thomas F. Eagleton (Dem-Mo.) and Chairman J. William Fulbright (Dem-Ark.) found out about the Annenberg letters from

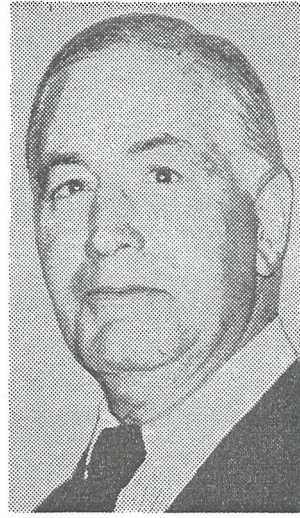
two college professors, who wrote them complaining that the State Department had sent them material at government expense apparently with the sole purpose of touting Mr. Nixon.

The February 5 letter from Annenberg drew attention to editorials in the London press praising Mr. Nixon's handling of the Vietnam war and the peace negotiations.

"Both editorials center on President Nixon's strong but quiet leadership," Annenberg wrote. "They also show that the president's emphasis on the solid achievement of sensible and realistic goals is not only important to Americans at home, but to our allies as well."

When Fulbright and Eagleton first asked for an explanation from the State Department, Marshall Wright, the acting assistant secretary for congressional relations, defended Annenberg.

Wright said Annenberg "decided to send this letter to United States citizens . . . to show that there is intelligent and articulate support for these policies in important sections of the British



WALTER ANNENBERG
 He wrote it

press. We do not believe that Ambassador Annenberg's correspondence constitutes a partisan political activity."

Unsatisfied, Eagleton and Fulbright demanded more information. Yesterday they received a letter from Wright claiming further inquiries had been made and it was discovered that Annenberg's explanation "was neither as complete nor as accurate as it should have been."

"We have learned from Ambassador Annenberg that the initiative for his letter came from Mr. Charles Colson . . .," Wright said. "Ambassador Annenberg further informs us that he signed one copy of the letter in question and gave it to Mr. Colson. He assumes that Mr. Colson subsequently reproduced the letter and arranged for its distribution."

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