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Stans Takes the Stand:

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'... In the Public Interest'

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As he gripped the witness's microphone with well-manicured hands, just enough neat white cuff emerged to expose cufflinks with the seal of the President of the United States.

His tie clip was another exclusive—a simple gold bar with the signature of Richard M. Nixon.

The Senate Watergate Committee made its first public foray into the President's inner circle yesterday, when it called Maurice H. Stans.

He fit the part well: a handsome tan, nicely clipped gray hair, a hand-sewn blue pin-stripe suit with polka-dot silk lining, and as a souvenir of his well-known African safaris, a large ring with a gold leopard and star sapphire. A little thin, perhaps, but looking younger than his 65 years.

The committee, which has been somewhat rougher with other witnesses, seemed to accord Stans the deference that he might have expected, at least for the time being.

There had been a great deal of advance fuss about Stans' testimony—whether it would be fair to quiz on national television a man whose New York trial on perjury, conspiracy and obstruction of justice is pending in the fall.

His lawyer, a burly man named Robert W. Barker, warned that Stans might have to "degrade and embarrass" himself by invoking the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

But that indignity never became necessary, for the senators and their staff in-

dulged him in an essentially bureaucratic exercise.

The basic message of his appearance before the committee—"another service in the public interest," Stans called it—was that the investigating committee must keep in mind "four fundamental distinctions."

Those distinctions were between the President's campaign committee and the finance committee (which Stans headed), the old election financing law and the new one, the functions of the finance committee chairman and its treasurer, and the finance committee's activities before and after February 15, 1972, when Stans officially came aboard, having resigned as Secretary of Commerce.

What it all boiled down to, in well-modulated unemotional tones, was that Stans had his hands full with "the responsibility of raising the largest amount ever spent in a political campaign."

"I was after contributions," he said.

"I pressed continuously for reductions in overall spending, but the actual trend was constantly upward," he added after acknowledging that he has always been "a fiscal conservative."

Only because of "the effective organization we had built up across the county," Stans said, was the finance committee able to pay the bills run up by its profligate campaign colleagues.

Although claiming to be "a stickler for detail," Stans said he developed little detailed knowledge of what the people at the campaign committee were actually doing to re-elect the President. And he was certainly unaware of the after-hours activities of the general counsel, G. Gordon Liddy—later convicted as a Watergate conspirator.

In fact, Stans told the senators, Liddy did an "effective job" as counsel, advising, for example, that those who gave money before the strict campaign finance law went into effect April 7, 1972, were entitled to "a right of confidentiality."

What Stans seemed to be saying, as he denied any advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in and other campaign espionage and sabotage, was that he was merely respecting priorities established elsewhere.

He did acknowledge, however, that he had no real "superiors" and was only influenced "by requests from the White House" during the campaign.

One of those requests came on June 29, 1972, when Herbert W. Kalmbach, saying

"you will have to trust me," approached Stans for all the cash he could pull together.

No questions asked. Kalmbach said he had "an urgent need for money for a very high purpose," as it was related yesterday, and Stans knew that Kalmbach, in addition to being an excellent fund raiser, was the President's personal attorney. It wasn't mentioned at the hearing, but Kalmbach was also the lawyer for the Stans Foundation.

So the finance chief reached into his safe and instantly came up with \$75,000 in cash, nearly half of it delivered that same day by a Philippine national.

Stans trusted Kalmbach, and apparently the Senate committee trusted Stans because no one bothered to ask if he ever found out what the money was used for, although there have been allegations it went to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants.

On a few points, Stans expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the way the Watergate scandal has unfolded. He suggested that "the issue of confidentiality versus disclosure of such information (campaign contributions) has never been fairly presented to the public."

But on the whole, this was a different, milder man from the one who bitterly complained last fall that he had become the object of "transparently political" attacks.

Yesterday, Stans was polite, gentle and displayed a few brief flashes of humor.

When quizzed by Sen. Joseph Montoya (D-N.M.) about cash contributions to the Nixon campaign, Stans said there were about 30 to 35 at the level of at least \$10,000, about 25 to 30 at the level of at least \$20,000, and so on.

His lawyer interrupted to point out that Stans was not talking about the subject of the pending criminal case in New York, a \$200,000 campaign gift from financier Robert L. Vesco.

"Oh," said Stans offhandedly with a smile, "then you'd better reduce each category by one."

But the laughs were few and far between, and it was mostly a day of numbers, which left the unmathematical minds in the Senate Caucus Room spinning.

Stans seemed unruffled as he left last night for his apartment at the Watergate. He will be back on the stand today, with committee chairman Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) promising to focus on what he described to reporters as "a few salient points."