

More details, NYTimes 21 Jun, filed NixAd

'Routine'

Laird's Inquiry Into SEC Probe

Washington

Melvin Laird, just brought into the White House to help clean up after Watergate, directed aides while he was secretary of defense to inquire into a Securities and Exchange Commission stock fraud probe, SEC attorneys say.

Laird says the two inquiries last year were "a routine thing" carried out after he received complaints about the SEC from Edward Ball, a target of the investigation.

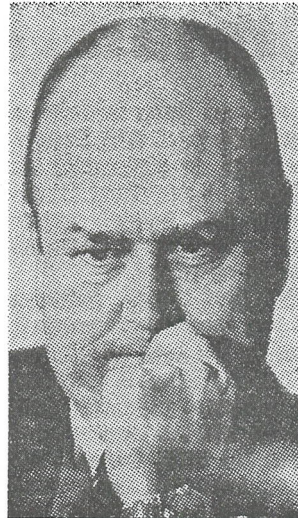
Laird, in a telephone interview yesterday, said his aides never reported back to him about their inquiries to the SEC and "nothing else ever happened."

The SEC filed suit Jan. 24, 1973, against Ball, the Florida East Coast Railway, the Alfred I. DuPont Testamentary Trust and others, charging that false and misleading proxy statements had been filed in connection with railroad affairs.

Laird's role was brought to light by SEC attorneys at a court proceeding Friday concerned with an SEC motion to compel Ball to answer 48 questions he had declined to answer June 12 in a deposition. Ball's attorneys, from the firm of former White House counselor Charles Colson, sought unsuccessfully to have the SEC's affidavit sealed so that the subject of the questions would not become public.

The questions principally concerned whether Ball had any dealings with Laird or three former Laird aides at the Defense Department, William Baroody, Carl Wallace and John Dressendorfer.

SEC attorney Theodore Levine told U.S. District Judge William B. Jones that, according to other SEC staffers, the first call from Laird's office in September, 1972, "was to ask the SEC investigators to stop harassing Mr. Ball, because he was an old man; two, to find



MELVIN LAIRD
Ex-defense secretary

out the status of the investigation . . ."

He said SEC staffers would not answer the questions.

Levine said that in the second call received about the time of the election in November 1972, "there was a question raised about the status of the investigation and where it was going and at that time I believe the communication back from the SEC was that it's none of your business or something, you had better stay away from it."

Levine said he was first told the calls had come from Baroody, now an assistant to White House counsel Leonard Garment. But he said after several calls, Baroody referred him to Wallace, who is still in the Defense Department as an assistant Army secretary and as acting liaison with the White House.

In the Florida East Coast Railway case, Ball had refused to answer SEC questions about contacts with the four men on advice from his attorney, Sidney Dickstein, that the questions were not relevant to the allegations in the civil fraud suit.

Laird said Ball raised the SEC matter with him during one of a number of luncheons Laird said he had with business, labor and other private organization leaders.

"I would ask for suggestions," said Laird. "He did complain about the SEC. When I get through with these luncheons, I give a list to my administrative assistant to find out what it is about." *Associated Press*