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Ford: Charges, Denials

A former lobbyist has sworn to the Senate Rules Committee that he "loaned" vice presidential nominee Gerald Ford \$15,000 to cover urgent personal needs. The loan, said lobbyist Robert Winter-Berger, was never paid.

In addition, said Winter-Berger, at Ford's request he arranged contributions totaling more than \$125,000 to various Republican campaign committees.

The ex-lobbyist, author of a book called "The Washington Pay-Off," went well beyond his literary recollections in a four-page affidavit which he has given to the committee and to us. Winter-Berger said he will submit to a lie-detector test if necessary. Ford, however, denied the charges and, through a spokesman, told us Winter-Berger's charges about a loan of \$15,000 was "a categorical lie." Ford also emphatically denied arranging any \$125,000 in contributions.

In his affidavit Winter-Berger stated: "Between 1966 and September of 1969, I personally loaned Gerald Ford in the neighborhood of \$15,000. . . This money was given to Ford in cash to cover an illness and hospitalization of his wife. . . . At other times he complained that he was short of money."

Winter-Berger swore that the loans were made in "amounts of \$50 to about \$250" over the three-year period. He did not ask repayment, and Ford never offered it, he said.

The dapper, balding former man-about-Capitol Hill said he also arranged for Francis Kellogg, now a special assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to contribute \$125,000 to various Republican causes at the request of Ford.

"I arranged for Kellogg to meet at least twice with Gerald Ford at Kellogg's request," attested Winter-Berger. "Ford agreed to help Kellogg get a government post. I have correspondence in my possession which proves that Kellogg was in touch with Herbert Kalmbach (President Nixon's personal lawyer) in reference to this desired appointment."

Winter-Berger says Kellogg wanted to become ambassador to Kenya. Instead, he wound up dealing with refugee affairs as a top official in Washington at the State Department. When we reached Kellogg, he admitted that Winter-Berger had set up appointments with Ford and that he had been in contact with Kalmbach about a diplomatic job. But he denied he contributed \$125,000. He told us the total was only \$28,000 and that it was not given at either Winter-Berger's or Ford's request.

The ex-wheeler dealer swore that at the 1969 Inaugural, "Ford supplied an official sticker for the private limousine" of a big GOP contributor "in return for a \$500 contribution to the Republican Congressional Boosters Committee." And for another \$500 to the same committee, Winter-Berger said, Ford got the contributor's grand nephew "a job as a congressional intern." Ford denied both these charges,

stating, "I wouldn't be so crude as to enter into a quid pro quo arrangement of that kind."

In the affidavit, Winter-Berger also dealt fully for the first time with his recollection of Ford's visit to New York psychotherapist Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker, who once counseled Richard Nixon. Ford has insisted to us he saw Hutschnecker for only 15 minutes, and never visited with him again. But Winter-Berger's affidavit takes issue: "I went into Dr. Hutschnecker's office and introduced him to Gerald Ford," the affidavit said. Winter-Berger maintained he walked a half-block to his own home and prepared "my own lunch which consisted of a hamburger which was broiled in a preheated oven. This took me approximately 40 minutes."

Winter-Berger then went back and waited in a rented limousine for Ford for 10 to 15 minutes, meaning that "Ford was with Hutschnecker for more than an hour." Winter-Berger swore that "about eight or nine months later" Hutschnecker told him he had met with Ford again and that Ford later confirmed this subsequent meeting to Winter-Berger.

Winter-Berger recounts that when he first recommended Hutschnecker to Ford, the lobbyist also mentioned that President Nixon had seen the doctor. "About 10 days later," swore Winter-Berger, "much to my surprise, (Ford) brought it up and said he had asked Dick (Nixon) and that Dick said he was a very good doctor. (Ford) then asked me to . . . set up an appointment with Dr. Hutschnecker."

While Ford steered clear of pocketing contributions, he was not above letting lobbyists give gifts to his staffers, Winter-Berger asserted. "One Christmas, I asked Mr. Ford if it was all right with him if I gave some (gifts to) his staff. He said he didn't mind, as long as I didn't give them in the office."

Winter-Berger said he gave three of Ford's aides wallets, each with \$100 bills in them. Two of the staffers thanked him in writing, one did it personally. He said, "Ford never did any favor for me unless I indicated that in some way or manner, by contributions or other means, the Republican Party would benefit." Mildred Leonard, a Ford aide, disputed the alleged \$100 gift, calling it "a complete lie. He gave us the billfolds, and that's all."

Once, said Winter-Berger, "I slipped an envelope which contained \$2,000 across his desk. He refused it, with the suggestion that if I wanted to do him a favor I could buy some tickets to a dinner that was being given in his honor in Grand Rapids at which Richard Nixon was the honored speaker. I bought five tickets (for) \$500."

Summing up, Winter-Berger said, "I regarded myself as a personal friend of Gerald Ford's." He was making the affidavit, he said, to try to get his side of the Ford controversy on the record. He said he is willing to repeat his story under oath if called before the Senate Rules Committee or the House Judiciary Committee, both considering Ford's nomination.