

Ex-Oil Aide Backs Off in Gifts Probe

Washington

A former oil company official who had been expected to tell Watergate investigators about petroleum industry political contributions has invoked the fifth amendment rather than testify.

The Senate Watergate staff attempted on Tuesday to question W. W. Keeler, former board chairman of the Phillips Petroleum Co., who is said to have served as coordinator for the industry's political contributions in 1972.

However, both Keeler and another Phillips executive, Carstens Slack, who heads the company's Washington office, refused to testify.

David M. Dorsen, assistant chief counsel to the Watergate committee, said the questions the two refused to answer not only covered illegal contributions by Phillips, which had been previously disclosed, but also covered the possibility of additional money generated elsewhere in the petroleum industry.

Earlier this year, Phillips and two other petroleum companies — Gulf Oil and Ashland Oil — admitted making illegal contributions of \$100,000 each to President Nixon's re-election campaign.

Thomas D. Finney, the attorney for Keeler and Slack, said his clients invoked the Fifth Amendment because "possible criminal charges were not yet resolved" by the Watergate special prosecutor's office.

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