

Nixons, Hughes and Watergate

Washington

The Senate Select Watergate committee is investigating the possibility that the Watergate burglary was an attempt to discover if Democratic National Committee Chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien had any damaging information linking billionaire recluse Howard Hughes and the Nixon administration.

The Senate committee has been told by witnesses in recent closed sessions that the Nixon administration was interested in whether O'Brien's business relationship with the Hughes Tool Co. between 1969 and 1972 had provided him information concerning campaign contributions from Hughes to President Nixon and the business dealings of Mr. Nixon's brothers.

Chief counsel Samuel Dash acknowledged yesterday that the Senate committee is pursuing the "theory" that the June 17, 1972, Watergate break-in was carried out to discover that information, if any, O'Brien had about activities involving Hughes that could prove embarrassing to the Nixon re-election campaign.

"That's a theory," Dash said. "This is one of a number of theories we are presently operating on. This is a viable theory. It may not prove to be true, but it is one we are operating on at the moment."

The Senate committee staff's investigation of a possible tie between the Hughes-Nixon relationships and the Watergate break-in indicates that the committee still is not satisfied that it has been given an adequate explanation of the burglary and bugging of the Democrats' Watergate headquarters.

In addition to serving as Democratic National Com-

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mittee chairman from 1969 to mid 1972, O'Brien also heads a public relations firm which, he has acknowledged publicly, was on a retainer from Hughes beginning in 1969. O'Brien said last night that he had no special information linking Hughes and the Nixon administration.

The new direction of the committee's investigation was made public yesterday in federal court papers filed in connection with a suit by employees of the Hughes empire who are seeking to bar the Senate committee from questioning them in private session. A federal judge has thus far refused to stop the committee from privately questioning the Hughes employees.

Among the documents filed in connection with the suit is the transcript of the Senate committee's December 4 executive session in which the committee's lawyers made reference to oth-

er closed session testimony that the Nixon administration was interested in the extent of O'Brien's knowledge about connections between the Hughes organization and Mr. Nixon.

The bulk of the four-hour session with Hughes lawyer Chester A. Davis involved wrangling over what documents he was required to produce for the committee. But Dash and assistant committee chief counsel Terry F. Lenzner summarized for the record earlier testimony gathered by the staff while investigating the \$100,000 purported campaign contribution from Hughes that was given to President Nixon's friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo.

Although it has been known for several weeks that the Senate committee was investigating the \$100,000 contribution from Hughes — as well as the relationship of President Nixon's brother, F. Donald Nixon, to Hughes aide John Meier and Hughes business dealings in Nevada — the minutes of the December 4 committee session are the

first suggestion that Hughes may be connected to the Watergate break-in and attempted bugging of O'Brien's telephone.

Comments made by assistant chief counsel Lenzner indicate that the Watergate break-in may have been generated by the same concern that caused an earlier but apparently abortive attempt to burglarize the safe of Las Vegas newspaper publisher Henry Greenspun. The committee already has heard public testimony from Watergate conspirators James W. McCord and E. Howard Hunt Jr. about the attempted Las Vegas burglary.

Lenzner indicated that the staff was "looking at" a discussion among deputy Nixon campaign manager Jeb Stuart Magruder, Attorney General John N. Mitchell and Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy concerning a "possible break-in" of Greenspun's safe.

Lenzner went on to say that the administration was at that time investigating whether Greenspun had information concerning the \$100,000 donation from Hughes to Rebozo and whether Greenspun had information relating to relationship between Meier and President Nixon's brothers, Donald and Edward.

"Thirdly," Lenzner said, "we have received allegations in our interviews and testimony that the \$100,000, while stated by Mr. Rebozo to have been for the (1972) presidential election, served a dual purpose; that the other purpose was that it was to be consideration in return for which the Hughes Tool Corporation received special benefits, special decisions by the administration on a variety of matters."

The \$100,000 purported campaign contribution was delivered to Rebozo in two \$50,000 installments in 1969 and 1970.

The "special benefits," as outlined by Lenzner, included the 1969 acquisition by Hughes of Air West, the acquisition of additional hotels in Las Vegas after the Justice Department had ruled that Hughes could acquire

no more Las Vegas hotels, and attempts by Hughes to stop underground nuclear testing in Nevada.

In response to a statement by Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (Rep-Conn.) at the closed session that Hughes may be somehow connected to the reason for the bug on O'Brien's phone, Lenzner said, "that is not the only basis, but we believe it was a basis."

A spokesman for Hughes said last night that he would have no comment on the December 4 Senate committee session because "all these matters have a bearing on all the lawsuits we're involved in."



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EDWARD NIXON
President's brother



F. DONALD NIXON
Business in Nevada