

CAMPAIGN FLIGHT LINKED TO VESCO

Records Show His Company Paid for Charter Copter Used by Dent Last Year

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

A helicopter chartered by Robert L. Vesco's company carried former White House aide Harry S. Dent to campaign appearances for President Nixon in New Jersey last year, according to records collected for a Federal investigation.

Despite an assertion by Harry L. Sears, former chairman of the Presidential re-election campaign in New Jersey, that his committee paid for the flight, helicopter records show that the International Controls Corporation, then headed by Mr. Vesco, paid for the charter.

Corporations are barred by law from contributing money or services to political campaigns.

The use of the helicopter by Mr. Dent—and by some other prominent figures, perhaps including a brother and a nephew of President Nixon's—emerged in a study of the helicopter records by new officers and representatives of International Controls, who are trying to trace the company's tangled finances.

Prosecutor to Get Data

The records are being turned over to the United States Attorney for the Southern District, Paul J. Curran, who has already subpoenaed other flight records in an investigation into whether Mr. Vesco may have made any as-yet unreported contribution to the President's re-election campaign.

One informant's report known to be under investigation concerns a supposed large cash contribution from Mr. Vesco that was allegedly transported by helicopter to Westchester County Airport. Mr. Curran said that he would not comment on any matter possibly under investigation.

There is no suggestion that Mr. Dent is in any way involved in that investigation.

Mr. Vesco, currently a fugitive, recently left the Bahamas even though a judge ruled last week that he could not be extradited to the United States to face charges made in a Federal indictment returned last July 20, that he had looted International Controls of \$50,000. The Securities and Exchange Commission has also charged him with having "spirited" away some \$224-million from four mutual funds.

Mr. Vesco was also indicted last May 10, along with former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans and Mr. Sears, former Republican majority leader of the New Jersey State Senate, on charges of conspiracy and obstruction of justice in connection with a secret \$200,000 cash contribution by Mr. Vesco to President Nixon's re-election campaign last year.

The flight with Mr. Dent aboard took place on Oct. 8, 1972. The charter company, Interstate Helicopter, Inc., first picked up Mr. Sears at Mr. Vesco's home helicopter pad in Boonton, N. J., then flew Mr. Sears to Newark to pick up Mr. Dent. The two men then flew to the day's first stop, a breakfast at the Springbrook Country Club in Morristown.

Made Other Stops

From there they went by car to other campaign appearances, at a hospital and park and one other site. Mr. Dent, a South Carolina lawyer credited with devising President Nixon's celebrated "Southern strategy," had been designated a "surrogate speaker" in the 1972 re-election campaign. He left the White House after the campaign and was named general counsel to the Republican National Committee.

At the time, Mr. Sears was also a board member of Mr. Vesco's company.

In telephone interviews, both Mr. Dent and Mr. Sears said that there was no contact at all with Mr. Vesco during the trip, nor did the two men discuss campaign financing, they said.

Asked why Mr. Vesco's company would pick up the helicopter bill for a campaign trip, Mr. Sears said, "I'm sure of this—it was billed to 'Creep'"—the Committee for the Re-election of the President. He said that there should be a bill showing that the committee had paid Fairfield Aviation for the flight. The committee had previously chartered an aircraft from that company.

However, the committee, after searching its records, was unable to come up with such a bill. Furthermore, Joel Grady, president of Fairfield General, which owned the now-defunct Fairfield Aviation, said in an interview that his company had not provided any helicopter on that date to the campaign committee.

Instead, records show that the helicopter was chartered for the under-\$200 flight by International Controls from Interstate Helicopter, a now-defunct company formerly owned by Bruce and Alexander Farkas of the Alexander's Department store chain.

Mr. Dent, after checking with Mr. Sears, said that Mr. Sears had told him that the New Jersey campaign committee had paid for the helicopter charter.