

Gas Rationing or Higher Prices?



Jack Anderson

PRIVATE government studies, bearing out President Nixon's apprehensions, have concluded that gasoline rationing not only would create an "administrative monstrosity" but would deteriorate into a black market system.

Instead of paying higher prices to legitimate dealers, customers would wind up paying black market operators, the studies warn. Already, hundreds of thousands of barrels of fuel are available on the black market at prices substantially higher than the Cost of Living Council has authorized.

The government studies cite the World War II experience, when crime syndicates did a brisk black market business and ration stamps were widely counterfeited. Yet World War II was a time of intense national patriotism.

Without these patriotic pressures upon the consumers, suggest the studies, the black market would flourish. Ration stamps would also be easier to counterfeit on today's offset presses.

In place of rationing, the President's energy advisers favor higher fuel prices, with a development tax that would divert excess profits into the search for new sources of energy.

★ ★ ★

SENATE Watergate investigators are digging into charges, made behind closed doors, that President Nixon and his brother have secret bank accounts with fugitive financier Robert Vesco in the Bahamas.

The allegation of the financial link with Vesco was made by John Meier, a former

consultant to billionaire Howard Hughes. Meier was once a neighbor, friend and occasional business associate of the President's brother.

A transcript of the secret session quotes Meier as saying: "I was told by Don on numerous occasions that both Don and his brother Richard — I don't know if Ed was mentioned — had accounts with Vesco in the Bahamas. That was in 1971 and 1972." Ed is the President's other brother, who carried a \$200,000 cash donation from Vesco to the President's campaign committee last year.

★ ★ ★

LATER in the interrogation, the transcript quotes Meier as saying: "I also had conversations with Donald about Vesco, his brother Richard and the accounts in the Bahamas. These discussions also involved Howard Hughes and Vesco."

The Bahamian government recently refused to extradite Vesco to the United States to face only the least serious of four federal indictments against him.

Vesco could not be reached in his Bahamas Commonwealth Bank and sources close to him said he is now in Costa Rica.

The White House said it does not comment on charges stemming from the Watergate Committee and a spokesman told us: "I think that will be our situation."

The President's brother, however, responded angrily to the statement. He termed the testimony "completely false and completely a lie."

"I never had any account outside this country," he said.