

Vesco Plea To Stans Described

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NEW YORK, March 13—A

former associate of financier Robert L. Vesco testified here today that he was present when Vesco told Maurice H. Stans that he wanted relief from a government investigation and that he wanted to be in the "front row" of 1972 Nixon re-election contributors.

Laurence B. Richardson Jr., once president of Vesco's International Controls Corp., told the jury in the trial here of Stans and John N. Mitchell that he and Vesco visited Stans in Washington on March 8, 1972.

Stans, the former Secretary of Commerce, at the time was chairman of the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, was head of the overall, re-election effort.

After some small talk, said Richardson, Vesco told Stans "that he had a problem, and the problem was that he and his company had been under investigation by the SEC and that investigation had been going on for more than a year."

The investigation, Richardson quoted Vesco as saying, was "completely without merit, and amounted to a personal vendetta and harassment of him. He mentioned he'd been put in jail in Ge-

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neva overnight" and that Mitchell had gotten him out after another Vesco associate, Harry L. Sears, had gotten word to Mitchell.

After Vesco finished telling Stans of his problems, said Richardson in a firm, clear voice, Stans asked, "Well, how much you got in mind to give?" and Vesco said, "Well, he'd like to be in the front row. How much do you have to give to be in the front row?"

Stans, Richardson said, then told them how much big contributors were being asked to give, and then said: "What've you got in mind?"

"I'd like to give half a million dollars," Richardson quoted Vesco as saying, "and what I propose to do is to give \$250,000 now and \$250,000

later."

Stans then explained the public reporting provisions of the new campaign reporting law, said Richardson, and suggested that the first half be given before the reporting provisions became effective April 7.

Then, said Richardson, Stans described how money could be given, Vesco said the form did not matter to him, and that Stans then said he'd like it in currency.

At that point, said Richardson, Vesco turned to Stans and said, "He means cash," then turned to Stans and asked, "Yes, you mean cash?" and Richardson quoted Stans as saying, "Yes, currency."

At one point, said Richardson, "Stans said to Vesco, 'I can't help with this [the SEC problem] but let's see if we can't get you an appointment with Mr. Mitchell today while you're here.' He picked up the phone to try to arrange it," said Richardson.

According to Richardson, Stans wasn't sure whether he had arranged the appointment, and instructed an associate, Daniel Hofgren, to show Vesco and Richardson how to go upstairs to Mitchell's law office to find out.

When Vesco and Richardson reached the receptionist at the Mitchell law office, Richardson said, Vesco told him: "You're not required for this meeting" and sent him away.

Richardson said he never found out whether Vesco got in to see Mitchell.

Richardson's testimony began today and much of what he said was damaging to the credibility of testimony given in the first week of the trial by Sears, former New Jersey senate majority leader and friend of Mitchell who originally was indicted in the case along with Vesco, Mitchell and Stans.

Mitchell and Stans are charged with conspiracy, obstruction of justice and lying to a grand jury in connection with alleged intervention with the SEC probe of Vesco in exchange for his campaign contribution.

Earlier today, Sears returned to the witness chair and his testimony of Tuesday—in which he repeatedly claimed to have done nothing wrong and in which he he seemed to be trying to belittle the government's case—came under attack.

A confrontation between the 37-year-old prosecutor, John R. Wing, and Sears, 53, a 6-foot-5 veteran politician, ensued; with Wing moving in with questions to try to trap Sears with previous testimony.

The result was Sears' acknowledgment that he lied to the grand jury here to protect Mitchell, and that he also lied to Vesco.

Sears explained his lies at first by saying, "The answers to those questions at the time were partly because I did not want to bring Mr. Mitchell into the thing."

"When you made those answers, you knew they were untrue, is that correct, Mr. Sears?" asked Wing.

"At the time I made them, yes, sir, I did," replied Sears.

"I felt," said Sears, "... that to answer that at that time would only confuse the matter and bring a man whom I had used and whom I considered a great friend into the thing"

Tuesday, a Mitchell attorney, Peter E. Fleming, brought out that Sears had been considered "the honest politician in New Jersey."

Today, Wing got Sears to acknowledge that he had lied to Vesco over whether he had attempted to contact a judge sitting on a Vesco suit.

"So, in other words, you lied to Vesco, too—is that correct?" asked Wing.

"Yes, sir," said Sears.

"And at this point you were the honest politician in New Jersey?" asked Wing sarcastically.

"Well, I don't know whether I should answer that question, Mr. Wing," said Sears. "As I said yesterday, I have always been willing to let other people make that judgment."

"You also said yesterday you agreed with that judgment," said Wing.

"Yes, sir, I did, and I do," said Sears.

At one point under Wing's barrage, Sears said it was "amazing the things you remember" when you have your recollection refreshed.

As to Vesco's request to Sears to get to the judge in his suit, Sears almost lectured Wing, saying:

"Well, this is the kind of request that you get [from] some people, good friends of yours, who want to call a judge and fix a ticket or do things like that.

"And you generally slough them off, Mr. Wing. I'm not sure you are totally familiar with that world, but I have grown up in it.

"And you turn people off in different ways, depending on the degree of friendship involved, the degree of loyalty you feel to those people.

"The degree perhaps even as I did in the case of Mr. Vesco, the degree of the gratitude I felt for him, which was the

very basis of our friendship, with his financial help for me, as I have testified, 1969. There was a very deep feeling of loyalty in my part, which it took a long time to wear off."

Also in Sears' re-direct examination, he said that, as far as he knew, President Nixon had nothing to do with the Vesco contribution.

At the end of Wing's questioning, a somewhat dispirited Sears acknowledged that he admitted to one of Wing's fellow prosecutors that, despite his statement Tuesday to the contrary, he had committed a crime.

Whereas Sears was a reluctant prosecution witness, Richardson appeared as a well-printed, ready talker for the government.

Repeatedly today he confirmed statements that had been in the prosecution's opening statement, such as quoting Vesco as saying that Sears had been "bought and paid for," of quoting Vesco as saying the secret campaign contribution was "a lot cheaper than legal fees" and others.

He classified one of Vesco's executives as a "baby sitter for Donald Nixon," and quoted Vesco as saying the President's nephew was the one spreading a rumor in Europe that Vesco's SEC problems would be taken care of through Mitchell.