

# Ford County's GOP Files Subpoenaed, Golf Outings Bared

4-22-76  
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President Ford was confronted yesterday with two unrelated news accounts that may involve his past activities as a congressman.

They surfaced during a crucial political week, just two days before the President's first nationally televised debate with Jimmy Carter, but it was not clear what, if any, political impact they would have.

Officials in Mr. Ford's home town, Grand Rapids, Mich., confirmed that records of the local Kent County Republican Party have been subpoenaed by the Watergate special prosecutor's office.

It could not be determined yesterday whether the subpoena involves the President directly. However, the special prosecutor's official has issued a second subpoena to the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, a New York-based maritime union that was Mr. Ford's largest financial backer in 1972, when he last ran for Congress. Records show the union gave Mr. Ford \$7,500 that year.

Both subpoenas call for records of campaign contributions and related documents from 1964 to the present. The Associated Press reported yesterday the records in Grand Rapids show that in 1970 the union sent two checks totaling \$4,500 to the Kent County Republican Party.

In the second development, White House officials confirmed that while he was a congressman Mr. Ford twice was a guest of United States Steel Corp. at a New Jersey golf club, where the giant corporation maintained a lodge to entertain important persons.

The two golf weekends were arranged by William Whyte, a longtime friend of Mr. Ford and the steel firm's chief Washington lobbyist, and were paid for by the corporation.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen attempted yesterday to play down the significance of the two reports.

He said there has been "no allegation, no suggestion" that the subpoena to two Kent County Republican committees "has anything to do with the President." Therefore, Nessen said, "there need not be any reaction" from the White House.

Nessen also maintained that White

House officials have had no contact with Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles H. Ruff or his staff in connection with the subpoena, nor made any attempt to determine whether Ruff's investigation involves the President.

In the case of the golf weekends, which occurred in 1964 and 1971, Nessen took a similar tack. "Is there a suggestion anything is improper here?" he asked.

Defending Mr. Ford's acceptance of the golf outings, Nessen said the President and Whyte have been friends for more than 20 years.

"Obviously, if the President thought there was something wrong with it he wouldn't have done it," he said.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the subpoena to the Kent County Republican Committee and the Kent County Republican Finance Committee. The two committees are part of the regular GOP organization in Mr. Ford's home county.

Paul Henry, the local Republican chairman, said yesterday that the subpoena was served on the committee late last month, but that its purpose is still not clear.

"It's very hard to say what they're after," he said.

According to Stephen C. Brandsdorfer, the lawyer for the two committees, FBI agents began combing through the records about 10 days ago. He said that they have removed some records from the party headquarters, but that he did not know what specific records these were.

In 1972, the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association contributed its \$7,500 to two separate campaign committees, the Ford for Congress Committee and the Friends of Jerry Ford Committee. The records of these two committees are not known to have been subpoenaed.

The golf outings were first reported by United Press International, which suggested that the 1971 trip may have violated a 1968 House ethics code provision against accepting gifts from corporations.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Whyte dismissed that notion. His firm paid for the accommodations at its lodge and the food, he said, and "I probably picked up the green fees and put it on my expense account."

"If that's immoral, I don't understand the code," he said. "I saw nothing wrong with two old friends playing golf at the toughest course in the country."