

How Tax Loopholes Benefited the Hunts



Jack Anderson

NELSON BUNKER HUNT is a chip off the old block. Like his famous father, the late H.L. Hunt, Bunker has made millions in oil, espouses right-wing causes and throws money away on gambling.

Now we have discovered that the two also shared a common secret: they managed to avoid paying federal income taxes for several years.

It was all perfectly legal. They simply took advantage of the tax loopholes available to the rich. Billions escape through these loopholes each year into the pockets of the privileged.

The oil depletion allowance, apparently, gave the Hunts their biggest tax break. This is a loophole big enough to drive an oil truck through. The depletion allowance costs the taxpayers, who don't own oil wells, a whopping \$3 billion a year.

For they must make up the taxes that the oil millionaires don't pay. There is no difference between \$3 billion in oil tax benefits and \$3 billion in welfare. Either way, it is money out of the pockets of the less-blessed taxpayers.

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SINCE, THE taxpayers, pay indirect welfare to Bunker Hunt, they are entitled to know how their money is spent. As a young man, he frequented Las Vegas nightclubs. A former Hunt aide told us that he would often lose huge bankrolls. Bunker also enjoyed betting on the ponies, so he bought himself a stable of thoroughbreds.

Most of his money comes from his vast, worldwide oil holdings. In 1965, he celebrated an oil find in Libya by inviting 500 friends from around the world to Claridge's Hotel in London. The Woody Herman Orchestra and two other bands were flown in to entertain at the tax-deductible ball.

Of course, Bunker can afford his fabulous lifestyle, as long as the American taxpayers contribute to it.

Footnote: a spokesman for Bunker Hunt, in response to our inquiries about his taxes, admitted that "there are some years when he didn't pay." The spokesman attributed the large legal write-offs to the oil depletion allowance.

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WASHINGTON WHIRL — In the back-rooms of the White House, President Ford has been referring to the oil squeeze grimly as a threat to the survival of democracy. Those who have heard him say he is dedicated to finding a peaceful solution, but they believe he would use military force as a last resort.

The President has a stubborn streak, which is beginning to show. He is talking about going on the attack against Congress, Harry Truman-style, if the Democrats continue to obstruct his programs.

President Ford may be looking for a new image for the Republican party, but he is relying on the same old image maker. The GOP has chosen President Nixon's controversial public relations adviser, Harry Treleaven, to do the face-lifting.

Today's column is by Jack Anderson and Les Whitten.