

Federal 'Tilt' to Rockwell Cited

By Jack Anderson

Rockwell International, the corporate giant, had demonstrated a strang knack for wangling government favors.

The pattern is described by investigators for Rep. John Murphy (D-N.Y.) in an unpublished staff report. Alleging a "government tilt toward Rockwell," the report makes these explosive accusations:

• When the Federal Aviation Administration wanted to modernize its air fleet, then Transportation Secretary John Volpe allegedly served notice that "he would approve the acquisition of the aircraft only on the condition that they come from Rockwell International."

• The Coast Guard is also rebuilding its air fleet with Rockwell Sabre liners. Yet "there was no competitive program established by the Coast Guard to guarantee that the best aircraft was selected for the least amount of money," charges the report.

Independent engineers, called in by Murphy to study the program, estimate "a minimum cost overrun of \$32 million with a possibility of the overrun reaching \$50 million."

• When complaints began reaching Congress of government favoritism toward Rockwell, the report alleges, "several companies were warned that punitive action would be taken in the future if they did not 'get the hell off' of this line of approach."

• The report cites the findings of a House civil service investigation that the Transportation Department was guilty of "cronysim" and "favoritism" in loading its professional staff with employees who had once worked at Rockwell.

• In an earlier column, we told how Rockwell unloaded on the taxpayers a lavish, out-of-the-way \$20 million building it couldn't use. We reported that the General Services Administration has agreed to take over the unoccupied Laguna Niguel, Calif., building in exchange for more desirable, government-owned property, which the corporation is eager to acquire. GSA boss Arthur Sampson, in rebuttal, called the exchange a "once-in-a-lifetime" bargain.

We spoke to Volpe in Rome, where he is now the U.S. ambassador. The former Transportation Secretary denied ordering the FAA to do business with Rockwell.

"I am damn sure I never did any such thing," Volpe told us. "My conscience wouldn't allow me to do it." Volpe's former FAA chief, John Shaffer, agreed emphatically that he had never been ordered to buy Rockwell planes. The contract was awarded, nevertheless, without competitive bidding.

Footnote: The Murphy investigators got their information, one of them told us, from a witness who had heard Volpe issue the Rockwell order. Three other witnesses privy to the arrange-

ment also confirmed it, said the investigator.

Dark Doings: The energy crisis has made one thing perfectly clear: bureaucrats don't trust each other to turn off lights. Ever since the government acknowledged there is an energy shortage, the General Services Administration has been sending crews around to federal buildings to remove excess light bulbs.

The experts prowl through offices and corridors with their light meters. When they find someone enjoying an extra lumen or two, they hustle in with their ladders and start yanking bulbs.

The great bulb raid, however, has created a storage problem. The GSA has accumulated 1.2 million fluorescent lamps and hasn't the room to keep them.

The federal raiders, therefore, have devised a grading system: the "bad" ones (though they were burning brightly when removed) are discarded; the "intermediate" ones are either donated to state agencies or put up for sale at government surplus stores; the "good" ones are stacked in warehouses.

Lucky Luckman: A mysterious, handwritten note, initialed by embattled Veterans Administrator Donald Johnson, directs that all the Veterans Administration's architectural contracts in California should be awarded to a Los Angeles engineering firm.

We have obtained a copy of the terse, handwritten order, which declares: "All A/E work in California (except Loma Linda) until further notice is to Luckman & Associates." The document is dated 12-17,71.

The instructions, according to our investigation, were not obeyed. At least six other contract awards have gone to firms other than Luckman since the memo was written. But Luckman landed by far the largest VA contracts in California, totalling just under \$3 million.

Through a VA spokesman, Johnson said he had no specific recollection of the memo but did not deny its existence. Still, any charge of favoritism, he declared, was "untrue."

Jim Luckman, commenting on behalf of the firm, said it had been awarded the big-money contracts because of previous "efficient and economical" work for the VA. Of the Johnson memo, Luckman said wryly: "I wish it were true."

Informed sources suggest that Johnson, an intensely partisan Nixon man, may have been influenced by the political support the firm's head, Charles Luckman, has given to President Nixon. Luckman, the former boy wonder of the Lever Brothers soap empire, contributed \$13,000 to the 1972 Nixon campaign.