

... And 48 Lashes With a Wet Noodle

By Art Buchwald

Capitol Punishment

President Ford has come out with a very tough program against crime.

His message to Congress took care of every type of felony except white-collar crime. I thought this was an oversight until I talked to a White House aide who said the President was still working on his white-collar crime program.

"The administration is going to get very tough on white-collar crime," the aide told me.

"What do you plan to do?"

"Well, any company that gives illegal campaign contributions to a political party will lose its private plane privileges for two weeks."

"That's good," I said. "What about executives who overcharge the government for defense work?"

"We're taking a hard line on that. Any company executive who overcharges the government more than \$5 million will be fined \$50 or have

to go to traffic school three nights a week."

"That will make him think twice. Suppose an oil company juggles its books and cheats consumers out of millions of dollars?"

"It could never happen," the aide said. "But if it did, that company would be forbidden to advertise on TV football games for one year."

"Will you propose any punishment for grain officials who sell millions of tons of rotten wheat abroad?"

"We certainly will. Any grain official convicted of selling bad wheat will lose half his tax rebate for 1975."

"What about men in high government positions who abuse the public trust and accept graft from crooked contractors?"

"The President will refuse to appoint them to the U.S. Supreme Court."

"He really sounds like he means business," I said.

The aide said "White-collar crime is a cancer on our society and we cannot tolerate it in a democratic system. The President has asked the Justice Department to root it out and make examples of the men who would flout the law."

"I guess that includes the drug companies that fix prices among themselves?" I asked.

"Of course. Price-fixing is one of the worst of all white-collar crimes because it hits everyone where it hurts most—in the pocketbook."

"Should drug company officials go to jail?"

"Only if they refuse to promise not to do it again."

"Now what about stock fraud where someone steals the savings of widows and orphans?"

"We think the widows and orphans should be given probation."

"No, I meant the men who perpetrated the stock frauds."

"We believe those matters should be settled out of court."

"Has the President made any provision in his white-collar crime message for real-estate operators and developers who sell faulty housing and worthless land?"

"Yes. Any real-estate operator or developer caught defrauding a buyer will not be permitted to buy U.S. government bonds for one year."

"That's what I call law and order. Now one more question. What penalties are you asking for a government agency that monitors your mail, breaks into your house, taps your phone and reads your IRS return without permission?"

"We are not asking for any."
"Why not?"

"The President considers them crimes of passion."