

WHITE HOUSE FUND FACING ABOLITION

House Panel Votes to End the Discretionary Money for 'Special Projects'

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON
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WASHINGTON, July 25—The House Appropriations Committee wiped out today the White House's traditional \$1.5-million "special projects" fund, from which the Nixon Administration paid, among other things, the \$130-a-day consulting fee of E. Howard Hunt Jr., the convicted Watergate conspirator.

The action signaled the possible end of the annual "blank checks" granted to Presidents since 1956 without conditions and usually without subsequent audits.

The committee's move reflected Capital Hill's resentment over the Watergate affair and, in miniature form, the Congressional drive for a stronger voice in budgeting.

Preliminary reports to the Appropriations Committee from the General Accounting Office indicated that "special projects" money was used in 1971 and 1972 to pay travel bills and parts of salaries for a number of regular White House staff members, and consulting fees for many others, including Hunt and Tom Charles Huston, who planned a partly illegal crackdown on radicals in 1970.

The committee cited, as its formal reason for abolishing the fund, the refusal of White House budget experts to account for their spending. Frederic V. Malek, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, declined at hearings last May to say whether the White House "plumbers" investigating the leak of the Pentagon papers in 1971 had been paid from "special proj-

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ects" funds. Mr. Malek also refused to give an accounting of Hunt's salary.

Tom Steed, an Oklahoma Democrat and chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that had reviewed the White House staff budget in detail, commented this afternoon, "I just wanted Mr. Malek to know that when he says I can't know what he did with the money, there ain't going to be no more money."

Even if the money had not gone to members of the Watergate crew, Mr. Steed said, he would have objected to the way it was used.

"Instead of it being for real special projects," he said, "too

their staff with it. If they wanted to expand the staff, they ought to ask for it."

In addition, Mr. Steed said, recent rulings of the House parliamentarian make it doubtful that appropriations to implement Executive orders — that is, discretionary Presidential funds, without a legislated purpose — are legal at all.

"There's no law to justify that appropriation," Mr. Steed said. "In that sense, it would have been vulnerable to a point of order from the floor. There's no legal way you can appropriate that money; we've been violating the law all these years anyway."

The White House had no comment on the House committee's action.

(L I N R (?) M I S S I N G)