

Nixon haunted by old Hughes, Hoffa ties in election year

WASHINGTON — Two ghosts from Richard Nixon's past have chosen an awkward moment to rattle their chains.

Just as the President is preening for his re-election campaign, the disembodied voice of phantom billionaire Howard Hughes and the mouthings of ex-labor lord Jimmy Hoffa have stirred old memories.

We have documentary evidence that the

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President has had a cozy relationship with both men in the past. The details don't make good political advertising in an election year.

The controversy over Hughes has revived our decade-old revelations about the \$205,000 that he loaned to Nixon's brother Don. The loan was secured by a mortgage on Lot 10 on Whittier Boulevard in Whittier, Calif. No bank would have accepted this Nixon family plot as security for a \$205,000 loan.

But at the time of the transaction, Richard Nixon was vice president, and Howard Hughes was deep in dealings with the U.S. government. These dealings weren't likely to be hurt by the fact that the Nixon family was beholden to him financially.

Hughes sought to strengthen his ties with Nixon early in 1968 when Nixon was campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination. The subject came up in a handwritten exchange between Hughes and his aide-de-camp in Nevada, Robert Maheu. We have seen the memos, which are supposed to be under court seal in Nevada.

Hughes helps Nixon

Hughes instructed Maheu on March 14, 1968: "I want you to go to see Nixon as my special confidential emissary. I feel there is a real valid possibility of a Republican victory this year. If that could be realized under our sponsorship and supervision every inch of the way, then we would be ready to follow with Laxalt as our next candidate."

Hughes referred to Paul Laxalt, then governor of Nevada, whom the billionaire hoped to groom for bigger things.

We have evidence that \$100,000 was siphoned off from the Silver Slipper casino and diverted to Nixon's crony, Bebe Rebozo, by Hughes' aide Richard Danner. The Silver Slipper is owned by Hughes as a personal holding, and its cash flow does not have to be recorded in corporate books.

Maheu and Danner refused to comment. Rebozo wouldn't take our calls.

We also have evidence that President Nixon's decision to let Jimmy Hoffa out of jail was the culmination of a long, secret friendship. We have seen correspondence that reveals Nixon was going to bat for the embattled Teamsters leader as far back as 1960.

Hoffa letters

The letters were written to Hoffa by Nixon's old political crony, Oakley Hunter, who now heads the Federal National Mortgage Association.

In August of 1960, a federal grand jury

in Orlando was about to indict Hoffa for misuse of union funds to promote a real estate development. Nixon, then vice president, intervened with William Rogers, then attorney general, to have the indictment held up.

This was political payment for Hoffa's backstage support of Nixon in his presidential race against the late John F. Kennedy. The Teamsters gave Nixon no public support, but Hoffa passed the word to his powerful lieutenants across the country to campaign for Nixon.

Once the election was over, Rogers went ahead with the indictment, and Hoffa was furious. This caused Oakley Hunter to write his secret letters.

"I know for a fact," Hunter wrote to Hoffa, "that your side of the case was put before the vice president and that he discussed the case with the attorney general."

Hunter added that Nixon "has been sympathetic toward you and has felt that you were being subjected to undue harassment."

Now Nixon, after waiting in vain for the Parole Board to release Hoffa, has granted the tough Teamsters leader a presidential parole.

Footnote: Hughes was careful in 1968 to play both sides of the street. His lieutenants offered to subsidize Larry O'Brien so he could serve without pay as Democratic National Chairman during the 1968 campaign. Both Humphrey and O'Brien acknowledge the offer was made, but both insist O'Brien never drew a dime from the Hughes interests during the campaign. Several months later, however, he was retained by Hughes for a "substantial sum." Humphrey's son, Robert, was also employed by a Hughes company as a sales representative.

HEADLINES AND FOOTNOTES

Hat Hullabaloo—Capt. Raymond Hopkins, a 26-year-old black veteran of Vietnam, is being court-martialed because he wouldn't wear his hat. Hopkins' superiors for months have harassed him about his modified Afro hairdo, even though the Army admits it is within Army regulations. A NAACP branch and a black college student group are supporting Hopkins. The court-martial was demanded by a white WAC Lt. Col. Jeane Wolcott, who claims her action against Hopkins has nothing to do with his race. But she concedes her single "order" to him to wear a hat was in a private chat. She admits that, without further warning, she demanded action against him when she spotted him a few days later outside without a hat.

Land Lollapalooza — The Interior Department is investigating millions of acres in mining claims filed by an Oklahoma-based promoter who has tried to sell them for cabins, farms and the like. The promoter is Merle Zweifel, head of Zweifel International Prospectors. Interior's files show Nevada has indicted him "on 17 counts of trying to file false claims," and Interior itself is seeking a ruling that many of his claims are "null and void." Prodded by Sen. Lee Metcalf, D-Mont., Interior is investigating Zweifel's bizarre land schemes in Arizona, Nevada, Montana and Colorado.