

Witness Filled in Hughes Gift

By George Lardner
Washington Post Staff Writer

Billionaire Howard Hughes contributed to President Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign with blank checks, according to testimony by convicted Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy's former secretary, Liddy's secretary, Sally Harmony, said she filled in the checks in amounts dictated to her by Liddy.

Her testimony about the Hughes contributions was unsealed in federal court here yesterday.

Miss Harmony made the statements last May 11 in connection with a civil suit filed by the Democratic National Committee for damages in the Watergate break-in and bugging.

U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey ordered the testimony made public "in the interest of justice and the public's right to know." He said it had been sealed by agreement of opposing lawyers in the case without his knowledge.

In the long-secret testimony, Miss Harmony said that "several checks" signed by Robert Bennett, a Washington public relations man for the Hughes organization, were handed to her at Nixon campaign headquarters with the amounts left blank.

"I know one time a contributor brought some checks to Mr. Liddy to sign and then I filled them out," Miss Harmony said. "That is what I did with a few checks like that. I put the amounts in."

Miss Harmony's testimony continued with this exchange,

under questions by DNC lawyer Malcolm R. Dunie.

Q. Do you know who the contributor was who gave you the blank checks?

Miss Harmony: yes.

Q. Who was that?

A. The check was signed by Boo Bennett, but it was not his money, no.

Q. Do you know whose money it was?

A. Howard Hughes' money.

Miss Harmony said she couldn't recall what amounts Liddy told her to put down on the checks, but as she remem-

bered it, several came in just a few days before April 7, 1972, the effective date of the new federal campaign financing disclosure law.

She indicated that the checks were made out to the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President, where Liddy worked as counsel, and perhaps other Nixon fund-raising committees.

Bennett, in addition to doing public relations work for the Hughes organization, played a role in the formation of dummy committees that re-

ceived Nixon campaign contributions from the milk producers. Convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt also worked at the Bennett firm.

The portion of Miss Harmony's deposition dealing with the blank checks was put under seal when Nixon finance committee lawyer Kenneth Wells Parkinson protested that the disclosure of pre-April 7 contributors was an issue being litigated in a separate lawsuit before U.S. District Judge Joseph Waddy

to Nixon

Judge Richey said he was unaware of the arrangement until the St. Louis Post-Dispatch learned of it and asked him to make the testimony public.

According to disclosures prompted by the lawsuit brought by Common Cause, before Judge Waddy, Hughes contributed \$50,000 to the Nixon campaign before the April 7 cutoff. The billionaire also is listed as having given \$100,000 for the President's re-election after April 7.