

Probe of Ford's Emissary

Washington

Benton L. Becker, the lawyer used by President Ford in negotiations with former President Nixon, is under investigation by the U.S. attorney's office here for what was described as tax evasion charges, informed sources said.

The investigation, the sources said stems from allegations made by Joel Kline, a convicted land and stock speculator, whom Becker once represented. Specifically, the sources said, Kline has charged that he assisted Becker in setting up an illegal tax dodge.

In an hour-long interview at his home in Potomac, Md., Becker flatly denied that he ever "got any income or hid any income in deals with Joel Kline. I've

never done anything illegal. The guy (Kline) just has a very fertile imagination."

Becker, has worked on special assignments for Gerald R. Ford in the past and was used by the White House last week to negotiate the agreement under which Mr. Nixon was allowed to retain custody of his presidential papers, documents and tape recordings.

Justice Department sources said when they learned that Becker had been used by the White House to negotiate with the former President.

"My God, doesn't Ford know about this case?" said one source. The guy's under investigation.

A White House spokesman said he had no knowledge of the investigation.

Justice Department

sources said that the Becker investigation is still in the hands of the U.S. attorney here and will be referred to the Justice Department. The sources said that the Internal Revenue Service would also be consulted on the case. These sources were made to prosecute Becker.

The allegations against Becker, the sources said, stem solely from the charges made by Kline, a one-time financial "whiz kid" who has since admitted to a host of white-collar crimes and has pleaded guilty of attempting to obstruct an investigation of his stock manipulations. Since then, Kline has become a government witness and appeared as a prosecution witness in the trial of former Baltimore county executive Dale Anderson.

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