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Businessmen Back Garrison With Cash

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A "conspiracy investigation fund has been created by New Orleans businessmen to underwrite Dist Atty. Jim Garrison's pledge to prove there was a conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

"It would amount to a blank check that would pay the cost of the investigation for months and even years," one of the businessmen sponsors said. "We are prepared to back Jim Garrison all the way . . . five years if necessary."

Garrison said it might be months rather than weeks before arrest could be made.

He also said he would go to banks, if necessary to personally borrow money to finance the investigation.

While there have been a number of critics of the Warren Report, Garrison is the first public official with power to investigate to say there was a conspiracy.

Convinced that Garrison is right and will produce results if his investigation is free of money obstacles, various New Orleans businessmen pledged to privately finance the investigation.

The Associated Press learned that pledges have been made. The prime mover behind the fund raising is Joseph M. Rault Jr., president of Rault Petroleum Corp, of New Orleans.

Rault confirmed the fund's existence, but declined to give any dollar amount.

Asked whether the fund could match the reported \$8,000 spent by the district attorney on the investigation in the last three months, Rault said:

"Yes. If he needs \$8,000 for the next three months he'll get it, and the three months after that. There is no time limit to this.

"We are prepared to back Jim Garrison all the way. It can be a year — or five years if necessary. And we'll provide whatever he needs. No questions asked."

Rault said Garrison would not be asked to give details of the nature of any specific investigative move. He said, however, that "this is not an open-end thing. We'll evaluate what is happening as we go along."

Rault declined to identify

businessmen who had made pledges, but said "they cross political lines. This a community action."

Another of the principal businessmen involved is Willard Robertson, wealthy New Orleans automobile distributor. Like Rault, he is a personal friend of Garrison.

The unorthodox financing of an investigation by a public official came about partly as a result of newspaper disclosures that Garrison was conducting an investigation into the Kennedy assassination.

The New Orleans States-Item broke the story after discovering that the district attorney's office had spent about \$8,000 in three months. Vouchers covering this amount described the use of travel funds for "special investigation."

Garrison said that by publishing the names of the cities to which his staff traveled, possible witnesses or suspects were alerted and that this impeded his investigation.

The solution, he said was to find money that wouldn't have to be accounted for in public records.