

Nixon Tampered with Justice, Life Magazine Report Claims

NEW YORK (AP) — Life magazine charges that the Nixon administration "has seriously tampered with justice in San Diego" in an effort to protect some of its most important friends there from criminal prosecutions. The administration denies the charge.

In an investigative report published Sunday, Life said it had learned that "the administration has in several instances taken steps to neutralize and frustrate its own law enforcement officials" by delaying prosecutions, curtailing investigations and other means.

The article by Life associate editors Denny Walsh and Tom Flaherty also said the President Nixon personally chose San Diego for the site of the Republican national convention next August and that he considers it his "lucky city."

A WHITE HOUSE spokesman denied Sunday night that Nixon had had a preference for the convention site. In an interview last July, however, White House communications director Herbert Klein said Nixon favored San Diego.

Responding to the tampering charges, the Justice Department issued a statement Sunday night stating "unequivocally that there has been no White House influence or attempted influence, direct or indirect, in the department's investigations and prosecutions."

Life said its investigation, which began last July, disclosed that the administration intervened in three cases, involving C. Arnholt Smith, a long-time friend and financial ally of Nixon; Frank Curran, a former San Diego mayor, and John Alessio, a real estate investor and head of a legal bookmaking operation in Mexico. The magazine said its probe showed that:

—Harry Steward, U.S. attorney for Southern California, "squashed" an investigation of reports that illegal political contributions were being funneled through a company controlled by Smith. Steward had been appointed by Nixon on Smith's recommendation, Life said.

WHEN STEWARD was investigated for obstructing justice, Deputy Atty. Gen. Richard Kleindienst publicly denied that Steward had done anything wrong.

—When former Democratic Mayor Curran was indicted in

1970 for allegedly taking a bribe from a cab firm to help raise taxi fares, the administration refused to let a federal investigator testify for the prosecution.

Curran, who had won office with the backing of Smith, part owner of the taxi company until shortly before the fare increase, was acquitted, Life said. The magazine quoted Curran as saying Nixon called him the next day to congratulate him.

—During a criminal investigation for tax evasion of Alessio, Smith went to Washington to plead Alessio's case with Nixon, Life said it learned from sources. It said that in an interview Smith denied talking to the President about Alessio.

WITHIN days of Smith's alleged visit with the President, the administration called off its grand jury presentation statute of limitations nearly expired on a key portion.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover personally told the White House the investigation should be resumed and Alessio was later indicted, Life said.

Even after the indictment, the White House tried to get a federal agent who was involved in the investigation to circumvent his own agency's regulations, so the White House could learn what he knew about Smith, Alessio and Steward, Life said.

Ultimately the case went to trial and Alessio was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison.

There was no immediate comment from Smith, and a spokesman said there would be none at present.

Curran said today, "Everything in the article pertaining to me is untrue.

"Smith never entered the picture," the former mayor said, referring to his trial. "I talked to him about it all, but that was a year or so later."