

# Nixon aides avoid questions about President's secret profits

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Presidential aide Ron Ziegler exploded into a child-like temper tantrum when asked about Richard Nixon's San Clemente land dealings which were revealed in the last edition of the *Free Press*.

The *Free Press* outlined details of a secret land trust account and polite bureaucratic evasion concealing data surrounding strange financial arrangements involving Nixon's San Clemente estate. It told

of the refusal by various officials to admit or deny Nixon was paying \$100,000 a year on a \$350,000 mortgage covering his property and possibly personally pocketing \$200,000 a year in rental payments from a governmental agency leasing property for Western White House presidential use.

The outburst took place in the provisional press room established in the Granada Room of the Century Plaza for the \$1,000-a-plate dinner

honoring Nixon on September 27.

Ziegler had a huge grin on his face as he made his way through the room filled with members of the Washington and local press corps. Then he was stopped for the question about the possible land scandal.

Until then Ziegler had been having animated conversations with reporters from his old home town. Before going on the national scene he had

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been an employee of the Copley owned Glendale News Press — a not too fearless newspaper.

The simple question, "Mr. Ziegler, can you give me some information about all those land stories which keep cropping up and perhaps explain why Nixon has his land in a secret land trust account?" caused a look of consternation to cast a shadow over his brow.

He screamed, "That's all old news... the *Los Angeles Times* reported it two years ago." He closed his mouth for a moment; the veins started standing out on his throat and his face turned red as he spit out, "I don't have that information here, you call me in Washington tomorrow and I'll... I'll send you the whole story... that whole story was in *The Times* four years ago."

Ziegler kept pushing his way through the packed press room in a desperate attempt to get away from this reporter's questions. Finally he broke into a half trot-run getting himself lost in the darkened room and throngs of people. His final statement was, "I don't intend to talk about that now. You call me in Washington tomorrow."

In spite of the protestation, neither Ziegler nor any of the California "Re-elect the President" staff was willing to talk about Nixon's fundings. Two of the local staff apologized for not having any information, blaming the White House for a news blackout on the activities of the president.

Ziegler was still in California the next day at the time he was supposed to be on the scene at the White House. A week later the White House was again called for information about the property in question. The reporter was told the information from a May 12, 1969, press conference was lost from the White House files.

This was typical of *Free Press* attempts to obtain answers to the land trust puzzle. One official would refer the questioner to another official, who would in return refer the matter back to the first.

Meanwhile, *Free Press* columnist Jack Anderson learned this week that Nixon used \$13,500 in public money to renovate the heating system of the Spanish villa in San Clemente. The work was done at the same time laborers were busily converting the adjacent Coast Guard station into a government office complex to serve as the Western White House, and installing security equipment around the area.

Anderson reports no one apparently noticed that the General Services Administration, the government's supply arm, also took care of the installation of electric heat in the private 10-room manor and its guest house.

The renovation was apparently supervised by Herbert Kalmbach, the President's personal lawyer, who will not discuss it. Through his secretary, he cited the attorney-client privilege as his reason.

William Robinson, the GSA official who signed the contract for the job, claims he can't remember it, although he recalls the contracts for the construction of the office complex.

The Secret Service, however, which a week ago knew nothing of the Nixon land deal, had an imaginative explanation for the heating system. "The heating system was changed as a result of our suggestion that it be changed," said a spokesman.

"We considered the former system to be in such condition that it was a threat to the President's security.

"You wouldn't want the President of the United States to be living in a

house, where the heating system could cause a fire, would you?" the Secret Service man asked plaintively. He would not say, however, what was wrong with the old system that made it such a hazard or even what kind of system it was.

Anderson noted, "No one we contacted had a reason why the President, whose salary is \$200,000 a year, and whose net worth has been rocketing upward since he took office, was unwilling to pay for the heating system himself."

San Diego Democratic Party officials told the *Free Press* they were unable to get another aspect of the same story reported in the Nixon staff-dominated Copley San Diego news market. The San Diego Democratic spokesman believes the secret trust has something to do with the large picturesque beaches lining the edge of the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps reservation.

Several times in the past couple of years the President has attempted to arrange for the transfer of the Marine beach land into public purposes. The only hitch revolves around how much of the land will really be used for private development and how much will be turned over to public beach availability.

The San Diego official indicated the beach land was the last remaining beach land available in Southern California. "This land in the hands of a developer would soar in value to many millions of dollars and the President's land would soar in value right along with it."

Last week the *Free Press* reported Nixon had agreed to purchase the land in question for about \$350,000, with it now being valued at several times that amount.

Nixon's name has also been associated with several other pieces of land in Orange County and elsewhere in Southern California. His name has also been useful to his older brother Don. Don Nixon has on several occasions been able to use the Nixon name to obtain funds for various Orange and Los Angeles County enterprises with the implied suggestion that Nixon would be able to help speed Washington transactions of the firm.