

150 Secret Groups Were Used to Get Nixon Donations

12/16/72 By Morton Mintz

DEC 16 1972

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A public relations executive has sworn that he set up 150 separate secret fund-raising committees for President Nixon so that large contributors could "avoid the gift tax" by splitting up their gifts.

"This is a standard political practice used by both parties," Robert F. Bennett, president of Robert R. Mullen & Co., said in a deposition filed yesterday in U.S. District Court.

"It is little understood by the public at large," said Bennett, son of Sen. Wallace F. Bennett (R-Utah). "I did understand it, and decided, therefore, that this was a contribution I could make."

The younger Bennett was questioned by William A. Dobrovir, lawyer for the Ralph Nader Public Citizen organization and allied consumer groups that are suing the Nixon administration. The central complaint in their lawsuit is that the Agriculture Department raised milk price supports as a payoff for campaign contributions from three large dairymen's groups.

All but a few of the committees set up by Bennett got \$2,500 each from dairymen, for a total of \$232,500, in July, August and September of 1971.

Internal Revenue Service gift-tax regulations exempt a single person's gifts of up to \$3,000 in a single year to a single recipient. To comply with this, Bennett said, each of his

Howard Hunt, a key figure in the Watergate bugging case, headed one of the dummy committees, each of which had an account at the Union Trust Co.

Bennett said that Hunt, who worked for him, became a White House consultant in May 1971 and, as a result, said, "let's dissolve my committee." It was one of those that apparently did not get any funds.

Bennett said the idea for the multiple committees was "my own." But he had help on "the legal background" from Tom Evans, then of President Nixon's old law firm, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie & Alexander, and later co-chairman of the Republican National Committee, he said. Evans drafted the charter that the committees used, Bennett disclosed.

Bennett also told Dobrovir that he had explained to Mr. Nixon's personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach, that "I was engaged in developing these committees for the use of large contributors who wanted to avoid the gift tax."

Bennett said that he had met with Kalmbach here while the committees were "in the formative stage," but that Kalmbach did not indicate he would use them for donors he was recruiting.