

Justice Dept. Probe of GOP Spying

Washington

The Justice Department has begun an investigation of Donald H. Segretti, the young California lawyer who allegedly directed a political sabotage effort on behalf of the Republican Party during last year's presidential campaign.

Officials of the Justice Department's criminal division had said as recently as three weeks ago that they believed Segretti's activities were probably legal and did not merit a full investigation.

An administration source confirmed yesterday, however, that the department's fraud unit is looking into the possibility that Segretti has violated a federal statute that makes it illegal to print or distribute political literature that is unsigned or that bears the unauthorized signature of a candidate or political group.

WAIT

It was not learned why the Justice Department, which knew about Segretti as early as last July, had waited until now to begin a formal investigation.

The FBI was initially led to Segretti through a number of long-distance calls placed to his telephone from the home and office of E. Howard Hunt, Jr., a former White House consultant who recently pleaded guilty to charges of conspiring to tap telephones in the Democrat-

ic Party's Watergate offices.

A number of Segretti's friends and acquaintances have said that he asked them in late 1971 or early last year to act as informants for the Republicans while posing as campaign workers for various Democratic presidential candidates, or to assist him in otherwise disrupting the Democrats' efforts.

DENIALS

Since all of those who have reported being approached by Segretti have denied accepting his offers, it is not known precisely what sort of operation, if any, was conducted by him.

The New York Times reported last week that Dwight L. Chapin, President Nixon's appointments secretary, had told the FBI that he directed Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's personal attorney, to pay Segretti for his part in the alleged sabotage operation. Other reports have put the sum involved as high as \$35,000.

One congressional source, told of the Justice Department investigation, speculated that the Nixon administration might be planning to use it as an excuse not to turn over certain investigative files to a special Senate committee set up last week to look into the Watergate bugging case and the alleged sabotage operation.

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