

The Still Puzzling Tragedy of Rep. Mills

Mysteries continue to surround the death of Maryland Rep. William O. Mills, even though the investigation of the state's attorney seems to have been concluded with an official finding of suicide. While it may prove impossible to unravel the complete story of an unreported \$25,000 contribution to the 1971 campaign of Mr. Mills, the matter ought not to be dropped by state authorities. Today, Maryland election officials are scheduled to consider a complaint by Del. Charles A. Docter (D-Montgomery), who urged last month that the contribution—which came from the Finance Committee to Re-Elect the President—be referred to the state attorney general's office for legal action. In the interest of all that is coming to light under the loose category of "Watergate developments," we believe that further investigation is in order.

To be sure, there is danger in reading too much into the tragic death of Mr. Mills. Because of the earlier death of his campaign manager in a 1972 car crash, and a paucity of information from other aides, little is known about the handling of the contribution—who spent it or whether Mr. Mills even had any prior knowledge of the money until the story was publicly disclosed last month. Nevertheless, there is no getting around the fact that secrecy and cold cash—two elements running through the current national scandals—were involved in the Mills affair. The contribution to the Mills campaign was arranged by John N. Mitchell, and is the first public evidence that Nixon campaign funds were used for a congressional candidate. Interior Secretary Rogers C. B.

Morton, who was Mr. Mills' mentor, says he made the unusual money appeal to Mr. Mitchell after discussing the Eastern Shore campaign with Mills' aides. Since Mr. Mills was running in a special election for the seat that Mr. Morton had vacated when he joined the Cabinet, Mr. Morton said he agreed to help out. According to Mr. Morton, he and Mr. Mitchell agreed on the amount—though there is still no complete explanation as to what it was to be used for, why it was forwarded in cash, or where it wound up.

After news accounts of the contribution, Mr. Mills issued a statement denying knowledge of the money. But according to friends and congressional colleagues, he appeared deeply troubled by the "bad publicity." At the time of death, the congressman left seven notes, all similar and each maintaining his innocence. Since then, no evidence has surfaced linking Mr. Mills or any of his campaign staff with anything but a possible violation of the Maryland election law for not reporting the money.

Still unknown is who, if anyone, advised the Mills campaign not to report the contribution. Were there instructions from Nixon campaign officials to avoid reporting it? Was this special election the only instance in which contributions supposedly made to re-elect President Nixon were used for a congressional campaign?

The authority of Maryland investigators may be limited on this score, particularly since state law was not amended to prohibit unreported contributions from out of state until July 1971—after Mr. Mills' election. But in fairness to the congressman's family and friends, every effort should be made to bring more facts to light.