

Nixon Held Confident Rebozo Acted in No 'Improper' Way

By Lou Cannon

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The White House said yesterday that President Nixon was "confident" that his close friend, C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo "did not act in any improper way" in keeping a \$100,000 supposed campaign contribution from billionaire Howard Hughes in his safe deposit box.

White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren at first declined to respond to questions about Rebozo and said, "This is a story that has gone on too long, as far as I am concerned."

But when reporters at the daily White House briefing persisted in questioning him about Rebozo, Warren expressed presidential confidence in Rebozo's actions.

"Now the answer is that I thought this need not be spoken, but of course the President is confident that Mr. Rebozo acted in the proper fashion," Warren said.

Rebozo, in a five-hour interview with investigators of the Senate Watergate committee on Oct. 8, said that he returned the contribution, instead of giving it to Mr. Nixon, after storing it for more than three years in his safe deposit box. The money

was returned, Rebozo is reported to have said, because it had become an embarrassment.

Warren, who said Tuesday that the President "became aware" of the Hughes contribution after the 1972 election, made it plain yesterday that he didn't want to discuss the issue any more.

"This keeps coming up and keeps coming up and keeps coming up," Warren said at one point. At another he said, "This subject just keeps popping up and keeps growing."

Rebozo, a millionaire Florida businessman, is Mr. Nixon's next-door neighbor in Key Biscayne. He frequently entertains the President aboard his yacht, the *Coco Lobo II*, and is considered Mr. Nixon's closest companion.

Along with Robert Abplanalp, another millionaire friend of the President, Rebozo put up the money that enabled Mr. Nixon to buy his homes at San Clemente and Key Biscayne.

The Nixon administration twice reversed the recommendations of two federal bank examiners that a group of Florida businessmen be granted a charter to open a bank that would compete with the monopoly Key Biscayne bank run by Rebozo.

Warren was asked yesterday

about the bank charter and replied, "There was no White House involvement whatsoever."

Mortimer Fried, a lawyer who is one of those seeking to establish the second bank, said earlier this week that he believed political influence had something to do with his failure to obtain a charter.

Comptroller of the Currency James E. Smith denied Fried's allegation. But Smith, responding to a letter from House Banking Committee Chairman Wright Patman (D-Tex.) agreed to make all records of the bank charter case available to Patman's committee.

"At this point I do not have any data which would either refute or support the position taken by your office and I am in no way prejudging the case," Patman wrote.