

Nixon Seen Deeply Suspicious of Cox

By Jack Anderson

The real reason President Nixon fired the Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was to prevent the investigation from getting any closer to the Oval Office.

Sources who have heard the President express his misgivings say he became convinced Cox was out to get him. He believed the "Kennedy crowd" had taken over the special prosecutor's office and was embarked upon a "political witch hunt."

This idea was fostered by former presidential aides who expected to be prosecuted by Cox. Such Watergate figures as H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and Charles Colson spread the word around the White House that Cox was really aiming at the President.

Embattled and suspicious, Mr. Nixon was easy to persuade, and he began to feel Cox' hot breath on his neck. Two recent developments finally convinced him that he would have to fire Cox:

First, the President heard that the special prosecutors had badgered his former campaign manager, Clark MacGregor, for refusing to corroborate incriminating testimony from ex-FBI chief L. Patrick Gray III.

In telling about a telephone warning to the President that his top aides might be implicated in the Watergate crimes,

Gray swore he had discussed this with MacGregor. When MacGregor failed to support Gray's story, the prosecutors allegedly gave him a rough going-over.

Second, the President learned that Cox' bloodhounds were trying to link a \$100,000 contribution from billionaire Howard R. Hughes to the purchase of the Nixon estates at Key Biscayne and San Clemente. The money was delivered in \$100 bills to the President's friend, Bebe Rebozo, who claimed he returned the full amount after keeping it in a deposit box for three years.

The special prosecutors questioned the President's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, about the transaction a few days ago. He supported the White House claim that no money from Rebozo had gone into the San Clemente purchase. But Kalmbach raised doubts about another White House statement that the President had no knowledge of the \$100,000 payment until it came under investigation.

At a White House press briefing, a reporter noted that the President "has spent a great deal of time with Mr. Rebozo. Does the President and do you really expect the American people to believe that in all those years of the most frequent and intimate contact that Mr. Rebozo never told the President he had this money in his box?"

"Yes," insisted spokesman Gerald Warren, "because it happens to be true."

But Kalmbach tended to dispute this when he was interrogated behind closed doors by both the special prosecutors and Senate investigators. He had been sent by former White House aide John Ehrlichman to speak to Las Vegas publisher Hank Greenspun about Donald Nixon's involvement with the Hughes organization, Kalmbach said.

At their first meeting on Oct. 12, 1971, Greenspun told us, he raised the \$100,000 question and asked about rumors that the money had been diverted to San Clemente.

Kalmbach told the prosecutors, however, that he didn't recall discussing the \$100,000 contribution at the first meeting but remembered Greenspun had brought it up at a subsequent breakfast meeting on June 31, 1972. Kalmbach acknowledged that he "probably" gave Ehrlichman a full report afterward.

Apparently, both Rebozo and Ehrlichman knew, therefore, that the phantom billionaire had slipped \$100,000 in cash to Rebozo for Mr. Nixon's use. Rebozo and Ehrlichman were also aware that any link between Mr. Nixon and Hughes could be politically damaging. It was precisely to prevent any such embarrassing publicity that both Rebozo and Ehrlichman

had sought to keep the President's brother, Donald, away from the Hughes organization.

Yet the White House still maintains that the President was kept blissfully uninformed of the stack of greenbacks, which Rebozo says had been gathering dust for three years.

The first mention of the \$100,000 Hughes offering was published by us as early as Aug. 6, 1971. It is unlikely that our story passed unnoticed by the White House. For the White House was in the midst of a frantic effort to uncover and silence our sources.

On Feb. 11, 1971, a confidential report was submitted to Haldeman, then the White House staff chief, on a three-month investigation of our column.

The memo declared gravely: "Anderson does, indeed, have access to intelligence digests, and he proves it on a daily basis. It also appears his reference to private presidential memoranda is valid . . ."

This was the atmosphere when we first wrote about the \$100,000 that Hughes passed to Rebozo. Yet the White House is now pretending that it was so indifferent toward our column that no one even noticed the story.

Like so many other statements of the White House, this one, too, may have to be called "inoperative."