

# BUZHARDT AVOIDS A SENATE CLASH

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## Nixon Counsel Responds to Watergate Panel Queries on \$100,000 Contribution

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

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WASHINGTON, May 7—

J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., special counsel to President Nixon, invoked the doctrine of executive privilege and the attorney-client privilege before the Senate Watergate committee today but avoided an all-out confrontation by answering a series of questions about a \$100,000 Presidential campaign contribution, Senate sources said.

Mr. Buzhardt thus took a stand different, to a degree at least, from the one taken last week by Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., the White House chief of staff, who refused to answer any Senate committee queries about the contribution from Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire industrialist.

The committee has reportedly heard testimony indicating that part of the \$100,000 from Mr. Hughes, passed on in 1969 and 1970 to Charles G. Rebozo, one of the President's closest friends, was relayed to relatives and associates of Mr. Nixon as gifts or loans.

### Reports Lack of Concern

The sources said that Mr. Buzhardt minimized the significance of the \$100,000 in his testimony today. "He testified that no one in the White House was concerned about it," one source said, "that no one in the White House was in charge of that matter."

The source said further that Mr. Buzhardt, in his testimony, had characterized the \$100,000 contribution as "just some little nitty thing that happened to crop up and something that no one cared about."

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, a committee member who participated in the three-and-one-half-hour Buzhardt interview, later told newsmen, "We didn't learn a lot. The White House does not consider that this [the Hughes contribution] is their problem. "There's still an awful lot we don't know."

The Senate investigating team, headed by Terry F. Lenzner, was known to be concerned about the White House's possible involvement in an internal Revenue Service inquiry last year into the \$100,000. Mr. Rebozo has said that late last summer the revenue service cleared him of any wrongdoing in connection with his handling

of the cash.

The Senate committee has received testimony and a document indicating that Mr. Buzhardt was active last October in helping the White House prepare answers to questions from the revenue service about the cash. That would have been at least three months after the tax agency's inquiry into the cash was reportedly closed.

### Skepticism Expressed

Some Senate sources were skeptical of Mr. Buzhardt's assertions that the White House had showed little interest in the Hughes contribution. "This is slightly hard to swallow," one source said after Mr. Buzhardt's appearance.

The source was alluding to Mr. Buzhardt's testimony at a previous closed committee appearance in which he repeatedly said that he could not remember many details of his involvement. That testimony was later characterized as "evasive" by committee officials.

Both Mr. Rebozo and President Nixon have publicly said that the \$100,000 contribution was kept untouched in a safe-deposit box until its return to the Hughes interests in June, 1973, about two months after the revenue service began its investigation.

Last Oct. 18, however, General Haig, according to subsequent Senate testimony, telephoned Elliot L. Richardson, then the Attorney General, to complain on the President's behalf about the special Watergate prosecutor's interest in the contribution.

It was on that date, Oct. 18, the Watergate committee has learned, that a revenue agent tipped off Mr. Rebozo about a subpoena for his tax records that had been issued by Archibald Cox, then the special prosecutor.

General Haig, when asked by the Senate committee last week about his role in relaying the Presidential complaint to Mr. Richardson, produced a letter from Mr. Nixon ordering him "not to testify about any information received or activities undertaken while you served as my chief of staff."

Some Senate officials had expected Mr. Buzhardt to follow the policy of total noncooperation today, which in their view would have exposed him to possible charges of contempt of the Senate.

Senate sources said that, in light of Mr. Buzhardt's cooperation on the Hughes-Rebozo questions, the focus would shift to General Haig, who will be asked to testify about matters that involve the possible knowledge of illegalities. Senator Wickere said, "I obviously would vote for contempt. I don't consider him any different than any other citizen in this country."

The full seven-member committee is scheduled to meet in executive session Thursday to consider its course of action in case General Haig again invokes executive privilege.