

A Minor But Fearful Matter

Segretti's Tricks Raised Questions Over Haldeman, Kalmbach

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

White House determination to cover-up and protect higher-ups extended even to the political espionage activities of Donald H. Segretti, which President Nixon and his chief aides considered

There was fear within the Watergate-associated crimes, the most minor of the White House that the Segretti affair would implicate the President's chief of staff, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, who had approved his hiring, and Mr. Nixon's personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach, whose bank records would reveal a White House private investigation into the Chappaquiddick affair.

But in the end, the President regarded the Segretti matter as so minimally damaging to the White House that he proposed to "let it all hang out" and even use it to explain their resignation of Halderman.

That course was rejected because the President was convinced the press "won't believe the truth" that his appointments secretary, Dwight Chapin, acted on his own in recruiting Segretti for campaign dirty tricks.

"They'll say, 'Haldeman did it.' And then they'll say I did it," the President told White House John W. Dean III in a taped conversation on March 13, 1973.

These conclusions emerge from the House Judiciary Committee's compilation of evidence on White House surveillance and campaign activities made public today.

No significant new material on the Segretti affair is found in the 2,090-page compilation. But the documentation when taken together

underlines the fear within the White House that even the surfacing of all the facts regarding activities the President called "spongy" and "not good stuff" would be too risky.

The evidence suggests that this concern was behind Dean's successful effort to get the federal prosecutors to sidestep any questions about the involvement in the Segretti affair of Kalmbach, who paid Segretti salary and expenses out of a special Nixon campaign fund.

Kalmbach's name did surface, however, when a grand juror on his own asked Segretti where he got his money, and Segretti named Kalmbach.

The fear that the surfacing of Kalmbach would lead to revelation of the White House investigation into Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's involvement in the Chappaquiddick drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne is seen in the Nixon-Dean taped conversation of March 13, 1973:

Dean: "Well, now, let me tell you something that's — lurks at the bottom of this whole thing.

President: "Yeah."

Dean: "If, in going after Segretti, I — Segretti, right — they go after Kalmbach's bank records, you'll recall that sometime back — maybe you, you perhaps didn't know about this, it's very possible — that right after Chappaquiddick somebody was put up there to start observing. Within six hours."

President: "Did we?"

Dean: "That's right."

President: "I didn't know that."

Dean: "That man watched that — he was here for every second of Chappaquid-

dick, uh, for a year, and almost two years . . . Well, if they get to those bank records between, uh, it starts on July of '69 through June of '71, and they say, 'What are these about? Who is this fellow that's up in New York that you paid?' There comes Chappaquiddick with a vengeance. This guy is a, is a twenty-year detective on the, uh, New York State, uh, New York Police Department."

Dean was talking about Anthony J. Ulasevicz, who testified before the Senate Watergate Committee about his assignment to investigate Chappaquiddick for the White House.

Nowhere in the documentation is there any evidence that the President knew of the Segretti activity or had anything to do with it. In taped conversations Mr. Nixon is shown to have repeatedly downgraded the Segretti dirty tricks once he learned of them.

"Take that Segretti thing," he said in a taped talk with Dean on Feb. 28, 1973. "Ha, Jesus Christ. He was sort of a clownish figure, I don't see how our boys could have gone for him. But nevertheless they did. It was, it was really—shall we say, juvenile, the way that was handled. But nevertheless, what the hell did he do? What in the name of God did he do? Should, shouldn't we get, be trying to get intelligence? Weren't they trying to get intelligence from us? . . . "Don't we try to get schedules? Don't you try to disrupt their meetings?

Didn't they try to disrupt ours? Christ, they threw rocks, ran demonstrations, and shouted, cut the public address system, they had to tear gas them in Miami. What the hell was that all about?"

The evidence includes Chapin's acknowledgement that he was involved in discussions in November, 1972 about the necessity that he leave the staff as a result of the Segretti involvement, but that afterward he was promoted to Deputy Assistant to the President, and when he did quit, the White House denied the Segretti matter had anything to do with it.

When Haldeman resigned on April 30, 1973, no involvement with any specific wrongdoing was mentioned, but the evidence shows the President considered tying him to the Segretti affair as a way of indicating Haldeman had not done anything very wrong but was going because the President was determined to take action no matter how minor the offense.

"I hired Segretti. I did hire Segretti," Haldeman said to Mr. Nixon in an April 14, 1973 conversation, but he was clearly trying to hang on. "I'm not suggesting I'd like to resign," he said. "I would not like to . . . I'd be willing to, without creating any sticky problems."

Through it all, the President clung to the idea that the Segretti affair was being blown out of all proportions as one of the only things his political foes had to carp about.