

Strauss Version of Campaign Gift

Washington

Democratic National Chairman Robert Strauss has told the Los Angeles Times that he may have unknowingly committed a "technical" violation of the federal law on reporting political contributions when he was party treasurer in 1970 and 1971.

The Watergate Special Prosecutor's office is known to be pursuing an investigation into the case, and into other possible violations of disclosure statutes by political figures.

"I thought it was legal at the time," Strauss said of his handling of two cash contributions totaling \$50,000 which were arranged by top executives of Ashland Oil, Inc. of Kentucky.

Strauss said he reported the money as "miscellaneous" contributions, rather than listing the specific amounts and names of donors as the law required for gifts of more than \$100. He did so, he said, because he felt that Ashland officials didn't want the Nixon administration to know of the contribution.

The transaction first came to light last week when Ashland Oil pleaded guilty in U.S. district court here to charges of making illegal corporate contributions to the Democratic National Committee, through Strauss, and to politicians in both parties.

Strauss was not charged in these cases.

And he said that he was led to believe that the money came from individual executives, which would have

been legal, rather than from the company itself, which was a violation of the law.

But it is known that the special prosecutor's office is still gathering facts about the circumstances surrounding the \$50,000 gift to determine whether federal disclosure laws were violated.

Similar inquiries are being pressed into the way other illegal gifts from Ashland and other corporations were disclosed by their recipients.

Strauss said he met Ashland officials in Washington in April, 1970, shortly after he became committee treasurer.

Help was badly needed. \$9.5 million in debt and its creditors were pounding on the gates.

"I told them I was unable to make the payroll," Strauss said.

"I was just trying to keep the doors open."

Strauss said he believed most, if not all the money came from the then Ashland board chairman, Rexford Blazer, whom he met in a Washington restaurant only after the gift had been arranged.

"I want to thank you for what you've done for the Democratic party," Strauss said he told Blazer. "I couldn't have made the payroll without it."

Strauss said he had no trouble understanding why the money was in cash. "I knew exactly why — because they didn't want their names reported. You had a Republican administration (in the White House)."

Los Angeles Times