

LEGAL PERIL ENDS FOR NIXON DONORS

Time Limit Bars Charges Over Early 1972 Funds

WASHINGTON, April 7 (UPI) —The statute of limitations ran out today for further Watergate prosecution of donors of the \$20-million that poured into Richard M. Nixon's re-election committee before a new disclosure law became effective.

On April 7, 1972, a Federal election campaign act took effect, requiring campaign donations to be made public. Watergate investigators learned that in the days before that date many corporations and individuals secretly contributed a third of the \$60-million that was raised for Mr. Nixon's re-election.

A Common Cause suit forced publication of the list of contributions. Watergate prosecutors eventually got guilty pleas from 17 corporations and 15 corporate officials, mostly in connection with these contributions. Corporate contributions have long been illegal.

In the Campaign Reform Act of 1974, which took effect Jan. 1, a little-noticed amendment shortened the statute of limitations from five years to three years for criminal prosecution of corporate contribution and reporting violations. *

A study group headed by Associate Watergate Prosecutor Thomas McBride worked until the end, but no more indictments were forthcoming for violations before April 7, 1972.

Spokesmen for the prosecutors said that charges were still possible for violations in contributions and reporting after April 7, 1972.

Maurice H. Stans, former Commerce Secretary, testified that a desire for anonymity had led many contributors to give before April 7, 1972. Mr. Stans, who was President Nixon's chief fund-raiser, pleaded guilty to campaign finance misdemeanors last month.

* See column by William Safire, NYT 28 Apr 75, this file.