

# Ford's New Watergate Worries

Washington

President Ford was confronted yesterday with two questions from his congressional days that could become issues in his race to retain the White House.

There was only guarded comment from presidential spokesman Ron Nessen on the first disclosure that Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles H. Ruff has subpoenaed records going back to 1964 of two Republican committees in Kent county, Mich., Mr. Ford's political base. Also subpoenaed were records of political contributions made during the same period by the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, which contributed \$7500 to Mr. Ford's 1972 campaign for re-election to the House.

Under heavy questioning about the report, first published in yesterday's Wall Street Journal, Nessen said repeatedly that the White House has no information on the inquiry and said he knew of no evidence that Mr. Ford himself is under investigation. He referred further questions to Ruff, who declined through a spokesman to make any comment.

On the second issue, Nessen confirmed during the hour-long briefing that Mr. Ford, while a congressman, had at least twice been the guest of William G. Whyte, chief lobbyist for the United States Steel Corp., on golfing weekends that appear to have been paid for in large part by the corporation.

Emphasizing that Mr. Ford and Whyte have been friends and golfing partners for more than 20 years, Nessen said he had been told by Whyte that Mr. Ford had been his guest at a lodge owned by U.S. Steel

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once in 1964 and again "about five years ago." The lodge adjoins the Pine Valley County Club in Clementon, N.J.

"It's obvious that if the President thought there was anything wrong, he would not have done it," Nessen told a questioner.

Nessen told reporters that the special prosecutor's office has made "no contact whatsoever with the White House" with respect to the Michigan campaign records, and he emphasized that Mr. Ford had been the subject of a "very extensive investigation" by the congressional committee that recommended his confirmation as Vice President in 1973.

Nessen repeatedly referred questioners to a report of the House Judiciary Committee, which noted that its review of Mr. Ford's background had relied on the work of more than 350 FBI agents as well as the committee staff before a majority of the committee found Mr. Ford "fit and qualified."

That investigation included a review of all Mr. Ford's campaign statements from 1954 to 1972.

In Grand Rapids, Republican officials supplied a few of the specifics Nessen said the White House lacked.

Paul Henry, Republican chairman for Kent county, said records of the county committee and the Kent County GOP Finance Committee were subpoenaed late in August, shortly after Mr. Ford won nomination at the GOP convention in Kansas City. He said FBI agents



WILLIAM G. WHYTE  
U.S. Steel lobbyist

had been assigned at Ruff's request to look through the records, but that he had "no idea what they are looking for."

Hillary Snell, chairman of Mr. Ford's 1972 campaign committee, said the committee's records of that campaign had not been subpoenaed. He said he did not know of any records from the 12 previous Ford campaigns that were under scrutiny.

No Republican source in Grand Rapids came forward to suggest a reason for the inquiry, which Ruff apparently undertook under Justice Department regulations authorizing the special prosecutor to investigate "all offenses arising out of the 1972 presidential election."

Although Ruff operates with a staff of two attorneys and eight assistants under a Justice Department authorization, a spokesman for Attorney General Edward H. Levi refused to say whether Levi had discussed the inquiry with Ruff or to comment on any other aspect of the matter.

One of the questions left open was the reason for the prosecutor's subpoena of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association's campaign records, an action confirmed by a spokesman for the union. Mr. Ford's campaign records list the union's political action committee as the donor of two contributions to Mr. Ford's 1972 campaign that totaled \$7500.

Jesse M. Calhoon, the union's president, was quoted by the Wall Street Journal as saying it would "put me right in the middle of the national election" if he were to say what is involved in the investigation. Calhoon could not be reached for comment yesterday.

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When the Wall Street Journal story was raised at Nessen's morning briefing, the press secretary conceded that the President was "aware of the story" and had referred him to the House Judiciary Committee's report on his confirmation. Beyond that, Nessen declined to discuss the President's reaction.

As newsmen pressed, Nessen said at one point: "It seems to me your question is, can you prove the President is not under investigation? That's not the way it's supposed to work. There is no evidence. We have none certainly and the Wall Street Journal didn't report any."

Nessen said he had no knowledge that anyone at the White House, including presidential counsel Philip W. Buchen, or anyone at Mr. Ford's campaign committee, is looking into the matter.

During the discussion of Mr. Ford's golfing weekends with Whyte, a reporter noted that there was nothing in the law or the rules of the House in 1964 to prevent a congressman from accepting an invitation from a lobbyist. But the questioner suggested that acceptance of a second such favor in 1971 might conflict with the ethics code adopted by the House in 1968. It forbids members from accepting any "gifts of substantial value from any person, organization or corporation having a direct interest in legislation before the Congress."

Whyte, reached in Pittsburgh, said he recalled two weekends during which Mr. Ford had been his guest at the Pine Valley club, but added this was only his recollection, and "don't hang me if there's a third."

It is correct, Whyte said, that U.S. Steel paid for Mr. Ford's room and board, since Mr. Ford stayed as Whyte's guest at the Laurel Ridge Lodge, which the company owns. The lodge is still used to entertain customers of the corporation, Whyte said, adding that he did not believe "anyone from Washington" has been there for the past year.

Asked if Mr. Ford had reciprocated the hospitality, Whyte said that over the years he and his wife have been "entertained more at the Fords' home than we have entertained them in ours."

"Our wives are close friends; our son once dated Susan (the President's daughter) and we've played golf together more than 20 years," Whyte said. "That was the spirit behind my asking him to go up to Pine Valley, which is the toughest course in the world."