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# Confusion Deepens on Probe of Ford Funds

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The Justice Department and some of its officials became the principals yesterday in a confusing controversy over President Ford's involvement in an investigation of the use of campaign funds in Michigan in the decade between 1964 and 1974.

Deputy Attorney General Harold R. Tyler told The Washington Post Thursday that the investigation was launched by various Justice Department officials, including himself and Attorney General Edward H. Levi, and that "to the extent I know about it, this involves President Ford."

Within 24 hours he was being quoted by United Press International and The Washington Star as having said that he had no knowledge that Mr. Ford was involved in the investi-

gation and, further, that the investigation did not center on Mr. Ford's congressional campaigns during the years in question but rather that it centered on "the 1972 presidential campaign" in Mr. Ford's home county.

Simultaneously, the Associated Press was quoting Tyler as saying essentially what he had said to Post reporter Bob Woodward Thursday.

A few hours later, UPI changed its story to conform to the Associated Press version, and quoted the Justice Department spokesman, Robert Havel, as saying that "Tyler's knowledge of the case came solely from newspaper accounts and not an evaluation of the allegations."

On the heels of all that, Tyler late yesterday called a news conference to clarify the confusion, but when he had finished it remained.

He was mistaken, he said, in telling UPI that the investigation involved the 1972 presidential campaign. It was correct, he said, that he had told The Post that "to the extent I know about it, this involves President Ford."

But his knowledge of the case, he said, is based largely on news accounts, and he has no personal recollection that Mr. Ford's name was mentioned in connection with the original allegations. "I can't tell you who was involved," he said.

In sum, the department's official position is that it is in the dark about the investigation and that only Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles Ruff knows the facts.

Meanwhile, his superior, Attorney General , had nothing to say about the situation

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which has embarrassed the President and created a late-blooming campaign issue. Nor was there any comment from the special prosecutor, who is in charge of whatever investigation is under way.

What was clear yesterday was that the department and its officials were putting out conflicting statements. Even as Tyler sought to back off from his statement to The Post on Thursday, an FBI official on the scene in Kent County, Michigan, was asked directly: "Is there any dispute that the President was involved in the allegation?"

He replied: "Not that I'm aware of."

That answer was consistent with the direction of the FBI probe of Republican committees in Kent County and their use of campaign money for the period 1964-74.

Officials of these committees, including Thomas Bloodgood, a Republican campaign fund chairman, have been questioned at length by FBI agents as to the possibility that campaign contributions from maritime interests were covertly returned in any fashion to Mr. Ford.

By Tyler's account on Thursday, the investigation was prompted by allegations from an unidentified FBI informer. Tyler said the allegations were discussed by himself, Levi, FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley and FBI Associate Director James Adams. They decided collectively, he said, to refer the matter to Ruff, who set the investigation in motion.

What Tyler knew then or now about the substance of the allegations is unclear, according to his version of the matter.

They involved, he told Woodward Thursday, "possible payments to federal political candidates, ranking elective officials in Kent County or Grand Rapids [Mr. Ford's hometown] and of course that means one thing."

What "one thing" did it mean?

At one point, Tyler said, "To the extent I know about it, this involves President Ford."

At another point, when asked if Mr. Ford was a "target" of the investigation, Tyler said, "I don't even know that."

At still another point, he said, "Most of my information about the investigation [now] comes from the newspapers."

There was a further ambiguity and nuance in another Tyler remark in which he ruminated about the problem of conducting investigations against public officials during election campaigns.

"Take these recent allegations that

Ruff is looking into," Tyler remarked. . . . One wonders about the allegations against Ford. Is it right to have the electorate as well as the man without knowledge [of what the allegations are]?"

Mr. Ford raised that question obliquely in a news conference Thursday. He denied any wrongdoing, referred to the extensive investigation of his personal and political finances prior to his confirmation as Vice President in 1973, and said, with some emotion:

"It is more important to me personally that it be cleared up because I am

very proud of my record of personal integrity and I think that is more important than any impact [the investigation] might have on the election."

He and others at the White House have said repeatedly that they had no idea what the Justice Department is looking for or what the allegations might be.

But last night Robert J. McBain Sr., Mr. Ford's personal accountant for the past 20 years, was called to the White House from Michigan by Philip Buchen, the President's counsel.