

Probe of Ford

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Mich. Funds

Remains Open

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Washington Post Staff Writers

Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles Ruff has not closed his investigation of President Ford's handling of maritime union contributions as a congressman, according to well-informed sources.

The FBI phase of the inquiry is almost complete and has turned up nothing to implicate Mr. Ford criminally, the sources said.

"But that is only part of the investigation," one source said. "No decision has been made. Just don't jump to conclusions one way or the other."

Ruff declined yesterday to discuss the substance of an Associated Press report that quoted a Justice Department source to the effect that Mr. Ford would be cleared by the special prosecutor's investigation.

"However," Ruff told a Washington Post reporter, "I will state that it has never been the policy of this office to keep the Justice Department informed of our day-to-day, minute-to-minute or month-to-month progress on any investigations."

Responding to a suggestion in the AP's report that he would issue a statement in the next week exonerating Mr. Ford, Ruff said: "I have no plans to make any statement. If and when making a statement becomes appropriate I will do so, but I don't want to even speculate about a time frame."

The FBI has been conducting field interviews and gathering subpoenaed records in the investigation, which is controlled solely by Ruff. Under the special prosecutor's unique charter of independence, he is empowered to make the final decision about whether any charges will be brought.

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Several sources consulted yesterday said the investigation appears to be headed toward a decision not to bring charges against Mr. Ford. But, in the words of one source, "definitive statements are premature."

To ensure that every avenue of inquiry has been fully pursued, Ruff often conducts interviews himself and calls witnesses before a grand jury, where testimony is taken under oath.

There is no indication that such testimony has been taken in the current

inquiry. If the FBI's work in the case is completed without developing evidence against the President, the case might be closed shortly afterward, according to knowledgeable sources.

Ruff is under pressure to expedite the inquiry. Former associates said last week that he feels strongly that it should be resolved before the election, if possible.

Ruff began his investigation after the Justice Department formally referred to the special prosecutor an FBI informant's allegations of campaign finance irregularities in Mr. Ford's old congressional district.

There have been no details published about the substance of the allegations, which Justice Department sources have described as "serious" and "significant."

The FBI has been dispatched by Ruff to interview former Republican officials in Kent County, Michigan—the area of Mr. Ford's former congressional district—and ask them if Mr. Ford received any cash back from local campaign committees.

The former officials have denied knowledge of any such transactions.

Ruff has also subpoenaed the campaign contribution records of two powerful maritime unions, the Seafarers International Union and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association.

A lawyer for the Marine Engineers said last week that FBI agents wanted to look at canceled checks and ledger books dealing with \$12,500 the union gave to Mr. Ford in 1970 and 1972 as campaign contributions.

In addition, the FBI checked on another \$2,000 contribution given to the House Republican Campaign Committee, according to a Marine Engineers lawyer, who asked not to be identified.