

AP reveals legislators rented office equipment from Hull's company

AUSTIN, Tex. (AP) — Further investigation of Rep. Cordell Hull's companies shows they received \$24,605 in taxpayers' money for rental of office equipment and furniture to Hull and 12 other legislators.

And a spokesman in the state comptroller's office says the state could foreclose on one of the companies for failure to pay franchise taxes.

The Associated Press revealed Sunday that Hull paid \$2,625 from his legislative contingency to Astro Office Supply Co. over a 21-month period. The story also said Astro took in at least \$2,915 in rentals from seven other House members.

Hull denied any wrongdoing despite a provision in the state Constitution forbidding legislators to be "interested, either directly or indirectly, in any contract with the state . . ."

Hull, of Fort Worth, said Astro "merged with Commercial Office Supply about two years ago."

Asst. Secretary of State Bill Bowers said Tuesday that if that is true "they should have filed articles of merger for both corporations."

No articles of merger have been filed with the secretary of state's office for either company, an inspection showed.

Hull claimed he saved the state money by renting the furnishings for less than other companies would have rented them.

Both he and former Rep. Jack McLaughlin, a fellow incorporator of Astro, said the figures in The AP story were incorrect.

Hull said he rented "about \$1,000" worth of equipment from Astro.

McLaughlin, now commissioner

of the Texas Bureau of Labor Statistics, said: "somebody's got their figures all fouled up. There are some untruths."

The voucher register of the House shows Hull made 30 rental payments to Astro from his contingency expense fund from June 19, 1969, to March 21, 1972.

All payments were \$75 except for three: \$150 on April 23, 1970; \$225 on May 27, 1971; and \$225 on June 25, 1971. Total: \$2,625.

The voucher register shows Mc-

Laughlin made 16 rental payments to Astro from June 18, 1969, to Jan. 11, 1971. All payments were \$50 except for a \$100 payment on June 12, 1970. Total: \$850.

Hull admitted he still owes franchise taxes for 1970 on Astro, but he claimed he left the firm in a dormant condition in order to be able to activate it again, if he wants to, merely by payment of the taxes rather than have to go to the expense of

getting a charter for a new corporation.

Astro's charter was forfeited April 9, 1971, by the secretary of state's office because the franchise taxes were not paid. However, 10 payments from Hull's contingency fund totaling \$900 were made to Astro after that date.

Hull says the checks were sent on to Commercial Supply.

Two of the three incorporators of Commercial, John McSpadden

were incorporators of Astro together with Hull and McLaughlin. The third incorporator of Commercial was Joe K. Matthews of Fort Worth.

Hull said he owned 13 per cent of Commercial during most of the time he was making payments to it through Astro. But he has a larger interest in Commercial now, he said.

The House voucher register shows eight legislators rented

and Lucille Smith of Fort Worth, from Astro:

Hull, \$2,625; McLaughlin, \$850; Robert Burnett, Arlington, \$1,275; Bob Hendricks, McKinney, \$1,080; George T. Hinson, Mineola, \$400; Tom Holmes, Granbury, \$3,300; W. C. "Bud" Sherman, Fort Worth, \$1,350; and Neal Solomon, Mt. Vernon, \$1,100.

The register shows Sherman also rented \$5,125 worth of furnishings from Commercial, mak-

ing his total rental from firms \$6,475.

Five other House members shown to have rented from Commercial:

Frank Calhoun, Abilene, \$1,000; Dean Cobb, Dumas, \$1,000; Hilliard, Fort Worth, \$1,000; son D. "Gib" Lewis, Pockett, \$2,400; and Joe Spurlin, Worth, \$1,500.

Total for Astro: \$11,800; for Commercial: \$12,500; total: \$24,605.

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