

Democrats notice investigations

Ford's golf trips, campaign become issue

By DAVE RILEY  
Associated Press

Democrats are beginning to take pointed notice of federal investigations into President Ford's corporate golfing trips and handling of campaign funds while he was in Congress.

While Jimmy Carter, at home for a rest in Plains, Ga., has avoided direct comment, running mate Walter F. Mondale and Democratic National Chairman Robert Strauss both touched upon the issue Tuesday in their attacks upon the Republican ticket.

Mondale, in Toledo, Ohio, said Ford has been "ducking and hiding" from questions about the probes. Strauss chastised Republican vice-presidential nominee Bob Dole for suggesting that the investigations were politically motivated.

The Watergate special prosecutor's office is exploring the records of Ford's home district GOP organization in Kent County, Mich., reportedly to check whether Ford, as a congressman, illegally diverted campaign contributions to personal use by laundering the money through local party groups.

In addition, the Securities and Exchange Commission reportedly is investigating golfing trips made by Ford as a congressman. Those trips were paid for by the U.S. Steel Corp.

The White House said Tuesday that Ford had made trips to corporate golf courses while in Congress, but Ford press secretary Ron Nessen declined to comment when asked if Ford had, as a congressman, converted campaign funds to his personal use.

Ford has not personally mentioned the investigations and has not been available for questions. Ford remained at the White House on Monday, meeting with foreign dignitaries, setting the scene for his next debate with Carter on the subject of foreign affairs.

At Tuesday's briefing session,

Nessen disclosed that Ford had played golf on courses operated by Firestone Tire, Bethlehem Steel and Alcoa Aluminum.

He said he didn't know if the companies paid for Ford's expenses.

U.S. Steel reported last week that it paid for three Ford golf outings in New Jersey and for two visits to a company guest house near Disney World in Florida.

Explaining the golf outings, Nessen said, "The President is an avid golfer. He has played with regularity during his 26 years in Washington and he has accepted invitations at various clubs, which is customary. He played with friends, and at other times he invited his friends to be his guests at his club."

He said Ford quit accepting golfing trips when he became vice president in 1973. Asked why, Nessen replied, "He's in a different position now. He was vice president then and now he's President. Before that, he was a member of Congress."

Mondale at first avoided questions on the probes, saying, "I don't think I should be commenting on that until I'm personally sure what the situation is. Those questions shouldn't be put to me. They should be put to the person in the White House. I am told the President is unavailable for comment. I'm told he won't answer questions."

Then, in Toledo, he said Ford was "ducking and hiding behind his desk" and should answer questions about the investigations.

Dole said Monday that the Watergate prosecutor's investigation was "nothing but election year politics." Told about the White House revelation about the corporate golfing trips, Dole said he had no information and could not discuss it.

But Strauss said Dole's remarks about Watergate Prosecutor Charles Ruff were off base.

"I would remind the public and Sen. Dole that this is the very response Americans got from Nixon, Agnew — and Dole — in 1972, cov-

ering up the Watergate scandal until after the election."

Strauss said Dole and Ford have a right to remain silent on the probes but that "they do not have a right to impugn the motives of the FBI, the special prosecutor or Democratic party officials."

While Carter has not directly commented on the Ford investigations, he did refer Monday to political leadership that has been bogged down in Washington for 25 to 30 years, "drawing advice, counsel and financial support from lobbyists and special interests that 'belong to the same clubs, play golf on the same golf courses.'"

Asked if his remarks were directed at the Ford probes, Carter smiled and said, "I'll let you make the judgment about that."

In Plains, Carter studied for next week's debate and toured his peanut warehouse, but he kept his remarks mostly on the crop.

Carter has been advised by his top aides to be more cautious when answering questions because of criticism of his statements in recent interviews, including a controversial discussion in Playboy magazine.

Meanwhile, Chip Carter, son of the Democratic presidential nominee, is on his version of a whistle-stop campaign by airplane through Texas with stops in Wichita Falls, Abilene, Waco and San Angelo defending Jimmy Carter's controversial Playboy magazine interview.

Carter's 23-year-old son, who has campaigned for his father for 15 months, said in San Angelo last night that his father's remarks in the interview were taken out of context and misunderstood.

The presidential candidate said in a Playboy interview to be published in the November edition, "I don't think I would ever take on the same frame of mind that Nixon or Johnson did — lying, cheating and distorting the truth."

The younger Carter contended, as his mother Rosalynn Carter did last

week on her tour when excerpts of the interview were first released, that the remarks will be understood once the entire article is read.

The young campaigner said earlier in Wichita Falls, "Dad said three or four real nice things about President Johnson in that interview, and I have never heard my father say one bad thing about Lyndon Johnson."

He told inquisitive audiences across the state that he never read a Playboy magazine in his life — but he said he might read the November issue.

After diverting questions about the Playboy interview, young Carter briefly outlined several of his father's policies and plans.

In San Angelo, Carter said his father wants to make taxes "equitable for everyone." He defined the average American income as \$20,000 and said Jimmy Carter would try to

cut the average tax payer's income tax by 50 per cent.

Carter said in Wichita Falls that the former Georgia governor would introduce a new type of foreign policy if elected President.

Young Carter said, "He would operate a very open foreign policy — so that the American people know what our foreign policy is. The mistakes that we have made recently have been due to the fact that the American people did not know what was going on."

Wichita Falls Mayor J. C. Boyd asked if the father really is a "free-spending liberal" who will spend the United States into ruin if elected.

Carter replied that his father is dedicated to the concept of zero based budgeting, reduced unemployment and a balanced budget by 1981.

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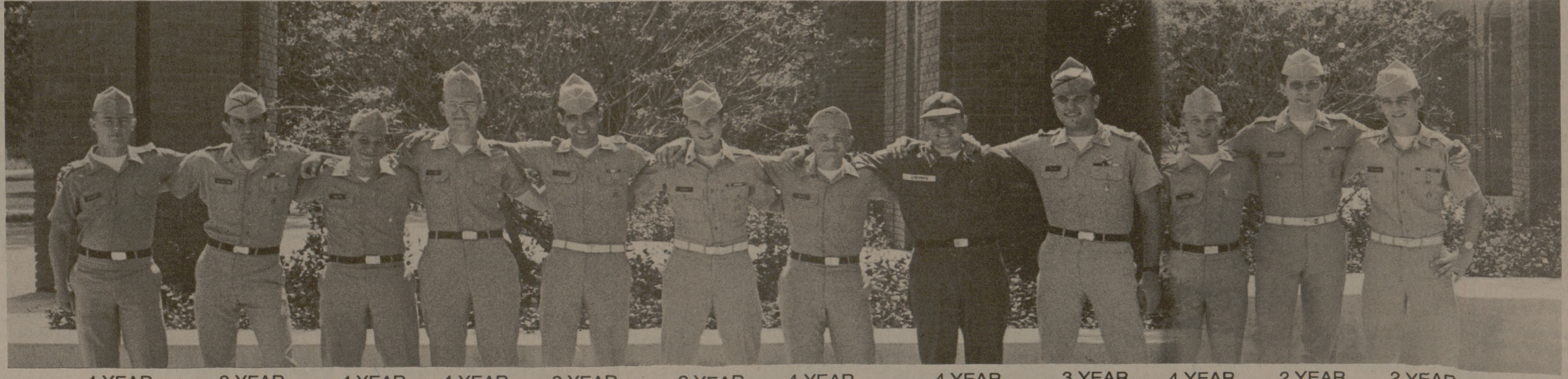
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