

Democrats on Hill Hit Back at Nixon

9/7/73

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Congressional Democrats lashed back at President Nixon's criticism of their "disappointing performance" yesterday, though both sides continued to voice hopes of reaching an accommodation on legislation.

"President Nixon's economic policies have brought nothing but inflation and misery to the people," said House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill (D-Mass.), who had offered an olive branch to the administration Tuesday in an effort to end the battle of the vetoes. "It is natural that he would want to put the monkey on someone else's back."

O'Neill had proposed that Melvin R. Laird, a counselor to the President and former House member, sit down with Democratic leaders and try to work out legislation acceptable to both sides.

O'Neill told the House that just 10 minutes before President Nixon's televised news conference on Wednesday, "Mr. Laird was on the phone with me setting up a meeting. Then came the press conference and it was hard to tell whether the President was calling for teamwork or scrimmage."

So O'Neill unloaded on the President: "The economic ills of this nation stem directly from the economic policies of the Nixon administration . . . In his first four years, his



REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL
... blasts President

budgets added a staggering \$97 billion to the national debt . . . I do not believe the people can be diverted from the causes of this nation's economic ravishment. President Nixon's policies have been responsible."

Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.), chief deputy majority whip, followed O'Neill with a statement that "if President Nixon will stop attacking Congress and start attacking the problems this country faces, he will better serve the nation and his office. It is perfectly clear that Mr. Nixon's press conference was an effort to divert public attention from the problems he himself has created."

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Hill Democrats Reply To Nixon's Criticism

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But after a two-hour meeting with Mr. Nixon at the White House, House Minority Leader Gerald Ford (R-Mich.) and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) said the President hadn't really been trying to criticize Congress in his news conference.

They told reporters that Mr. Nixon was talking only about congressional performance in regard to administration proposals, not its overall record. And Ford said when Mr. Nixon used the word "disappointing," he wasn't criticizing Congress — just making an evaluation.

Ford said the President will meet personally with the speaker of the House and the Senate's majority leader and is willing to cooperate with the Democrats. "The White House will work with the majority in Congress," he said.

House and Senate Democratic leaders met yesterday to discuss legislative plans for the rest of the session and issued a statement noting that "Congress does not 'Perform' at the behest of this President or any President. The Congress acts in accord with its independent judgment of what is best for the nation and the people."

"There are no apologies to make for this Congress," said the joint leadership statement. "The Congress is working hard. We want to get the job done. But we cannot do it alone. We welcome help from any source, including specifically the White House."

The Democratic leaders listed as among the major bills they hope to pass before adjourning for the year pension reform, manpower training including extension of the public employment program, aid to elementary and secondary schools, health maintenance and political campaign reform.

House Speaker Carl Albert, who has said the House hopes to pass a trade bill by early October, said he came away

from the joint meeting with the "impression" that the Senate will not act on it this year. There is also considerable doubt that the House will act on a major campaign reform bill this year, despite the assumed momentum given such legislation by Watergate revelations.

Albert also said the leadership set Oct. 15 as a target date for final adjournment, but added that the leaders haven't always proved "expert marksmen" in this guessing game.

O'Neill said Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield cautioned House leaders against "falling into a trap" in their efforts to work out compromise legislation through talks with Laird. The only public applause O'Neill's proposal has drawn has come from House conservatives. But he and Albert plan to meet with Laird early next week, and O'Neill said: "We're not inviting him up for a social visit."

The Republican congressional leaders who met with the President yesterday morning said Mr. Nixon put special stress on the need to pass a package of energy bills — of which only the Alaska oil pipeline bill has moved close to final passage — and his special revenue-sharing proposals for education, community development and manpower — which Democrats generally oppose.

One congressional leader said that the President had "regained his old interest in domestic programs," an interest that gave way in recent months to his preoccupation with Watergate.