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Social Security Record

President Nixon's technique in grabbing credit where credit is not his due was incredibly illustrated when he signed the latest legislation calling for an 11 per cent increase in Social Security benefits.

As he signed the bill in San Clemente, he spoke with pride of the fact that Social Security benefits "have risen by 68.5 per cent since this administration took office five years ago."

The writer is a veteran labor reporter in Washington.

What he did not say was that he and his top associates dragged their feet and tried to slow down Congress from enacting an increase in Social Security on the four separate occasions that Social Security benefits were raised.

Seventy-two year old Nelson Cruikshank, the vigorous president of the 4,000,000-member National Council of Senior Citizens, scorched the "dismal record" of the Nixon administration in its first five years. Not only has Mr. Nixon resisted adequate improvements in the Social Security system but, says Mr. Cruikshank, "he lacks a realistic income strategy for old Americans." But the President's effort to block improvements in Social Security benefits was thwarted by the Democratic Congress which attached Social Security increases to veto-proof legislation.

Here is the record, starting with his first year in office:

• In April 1969, Mr. Nixon proposed a 7 per cent increase in benefits. Organized labor and the National Council of Senior Citizens lobbied hard against the administration's proposal. Whereupon, in September of that year, the President relented and said he would go with 10 per cent. But Congress in-

sisted on a more adequate figure and in December, Congress tacked on a 15 per cent increase to the tax reform bill. Thereupon, the President reluctantly bowed and signed the bill on Dec. 30.

• In 1971, Nixon proposed a 6 per cent increase in Social Security benefits, but Congress—again by oblique action—stiff-armed the President. In March of that year, it passed a 10 per cent increase which was tied to the debt ceiling bill.

• In June 1972, Congress again circumvented the President. At first, he favored a 5 per cent increase but later agreed to a 10 per cent boost. Labor and senior citizens organizations insisted on a higher figure—20 per cent. This became law when Congress again attached the increase to the debt ceiling law.

In that presidential year, the re-election of the President was the main order of business. Without a flicker of embarrassment, President Nixon took the credit for the increase he had opposed. Every Social Security payment contained the following notice:

"Your Social Security payment has been increased by 20 per cent with this month's check by a new statute passed by Congress and signed into law by President Nixon on July 1, 1972."

• Finally, the other day, the President signed the latest Social Security bill for a two-step 11 per cent increase, the first increase of 7 per cent to be effective in March and the second in June. But Mr. Nixon wanted no increase at all until July.

Actually, if the President had his way in the last five years, the Nixon increases in Social Security benefits would have amounted, at best, to no more than 28 per cent instead of the 68.5 per cent to which he now points with pride.