

House Panel Sour on Proposed Cut In Milk Subsidies for Schoolchildren

2/19/66
By Eric Wentworth
Washington Post Staff Writer

A White House proposal to slash Federal milk subsidies for schoolchildren met a predictably sour reception before a House Agriculture subcommittee yesterday.

Congressional champions of both the children and dairymen ganged up on S. R. (Si) Smith, an Agriculture Department administrator who told the lawmakers that rising family incomes and the disappearance of a once-huge dairy surplus justify limiting Government subsidies largely to aid for needy children unable to buy their own.

"I'm saying that parents who can afford to buy their children's milk ought to pay for it," Smith contended. "Those who can't pay should get some assistance."

Called 'Means Test'

But Reps. Lynn Stalbaum (D-Wis.) and Albert Quie (R-Minn.) argued that no matter how deftly school administrators have handled such situations in the past, limiting the subsidies to aiding low-income children would amount to a "means test" that might embarrass them.

The Administration's scheme to cut the milk subsidy appropriation to \$21 million in the year starting July 1 from \$103 million in the current year was getting rough treatment before yesterday's airing in any event.

Chairman Harold D. Cooley (D-N.C.) of the House Agriculture Committee said Thursday the proposal "doesn't have a Chinaman's chance." The same day, Chairman Jamie L. Whitten (D-Miss.) of the House Appropriations subcommittee that handles Agriculture's budget said he expects to reject the proposed subsidy cuts for both school milk and the larger school hot lunch program.

Opposed by Proxmire

Sen. William Proxmire (D-

Wis.) has been inveighing daily on the Senate floor against the milk money cuts, including an Administration decision not to spend the full \$103 million that Congress appropriated for the current fiscal year.

Between them, the Government's milk and hot lunch subsidies help finance annual consumption of some three billion pints of fresh milk in the Nation's schools, amounting to about 5 per cent of the total consumed.

Smith conceded at yesterday's hearing that to trim the milk subsidy appropriation to \$21 million next year would reduce consumption by an estimated 500 million pints. But he insisted the smaller allocation would assure free or

cut-rate milk for children that need it most.

Cutback Outlined

The President's budget calls for cutting back school lunch subsidies, under which some 18 million children this year are getting low-cost or free meals (which include milk), to \$183 million in the year starting July 1, or \$19 million below the present level.

Special funds to feed needy children would rise to \$6.5 million from \$2 million. Smith estimated the cut would trim Federal contributions, which include both cash and surplus food, by an average of 1 per cent per meal. Such a small amount, he contended, shouldn't hurt the program significantly.