

Controversial Nixon-Connally Tapes

8/8/76
There are two controversial Nixon-Connally taped conversations; both took place in the Oval Office late in the afternoon on March 23, 1971. The first is printed in full in House Judiciary Committee hearings on the 1971 milk price-support decision and subsequent political contributions by the dairy industry. The second, barred from Connally's trial, has been reconstructed from court records unsealed by the judge.

In the first, which took place hours after the dairymen had urged Nixon to increase the price supports, Connally discussed the "political aspects" of the decision and reported to Nixon how the dairymen used a "checkoff" system to raise political money. Then he said, ". . . I wouldn't recommend that you do . . . that if it didn't have any merit to it. . . . If you can get more help for 'em", that will be more loyal to you. And I think they've got a worthy case to begin with. And that being true, I just think you ought to stretch the point.

"I wouldn't wait until next year . . . simply because they're going to make their association and their alliances this year and they're going to spend a lot of money this year in various congressional and senatorial races all over this United States."

Connally went on to say that if Nixon waited until 1972 to raise the supports ". . . they're going to say, 'Well, we put enough pressure on them this election year, they had to do it.' And you, you get no credit for it. So it's still going to cost you an enormous amount of money next year, and you get no political advantage out of it."

Connally then discussed with Nixon and Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin the possibility that Congress might pass a price-support boost, in which case the President would be denied credit.

There followed this exchange:

Hardin: "Well, if it does pass, I don't think the President has any choice but to sign it."

Nixon: "Well, all right."

Connally: "Well, then, what do you do? If you do, you've cost yourself the money — you've lost your political advantage. You, you're infinitely worse off."

Connally proposed that Nixon "trade for both years" — that is, agree to a two-year boost. Nixon agreed to "make the best deal you can . . . do it for two years" and "let them know what we're doing." (Aide John

Ehrlichman interjected: "Let's get credit.")

A moment later, Connally said: "Well, let's don't, let's don't trade . . . through Agriculture, on the merits—until some other conversations are had . . . All I'm saying is you—you're in this thing for everything you, you can get out of it."

As the meeting ended, Connally asked for two minutes alone with Nixon. The conversation also was taped, but kept sealed in court. However, the court reporter's record of discussions in U.S. District Court Judge George L. Hart Jr.'s chambers has Hart saying: "Then it was clear to me Connally said, 'It's on my honor to make sure there is very substantial oil in Texas that would be at your discretion.'" Connally argues that this discussion with Nixon referred to revenue-sharing legislation and he said "taxes," not "Texas."

Two days after this meeting, Hardin announced the increase in milk price supports, a reversal of his previous position. Connally subsequently was charged with receiving \$-0,000 for recommending the increase, and with concocting a false cover story and lying to a grand jury. He was acquitted in 1975.