

SF Chronicle NOV 16 1973

How Demos Tried to Raise Milk Prices

Washington

House and Senate records confirm President Nixon's contention that he was under great Democratic pressure for a dairy price increase in 1971, when he ordered a controversial boost in government price supports.

Mr. Nixon has been accused of reversing himself and raising dairy price supports from \$4.66 a hundredweight to \$4.93 on March 26, 1971, in return for pledges of political contributions from dairy industry organizations that subsequently gave \$427,500 to his campaign.

According to Representative Robin Beard (Rep-Tenn.), President Nixon, questioned about this charge in meetings with congressmen earlier this week, said Democrats on Capitol Hill, led by Representative Wilbur Mills (Ark.), House Speaker Carl Albert (Okla.) and senate majority leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.), were the ones who exerted the most pressure for the dairy price boost.

Records of the period show that congressional Democrats were indeed pressing the President sharply for a dairy price increase.

From one end of Capitol

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Hill to the other, Democratic senators and House members repeatedly demanded that the President reverse a March 12 decision to keep dairy supports at \$4.66 and boost them to \$4.93 or more.

Between March 12 and March 26, when Mr. Nixon did decide to raise the price to \$4.93, 121 members of the House introduced legislation to require a dairy boost to at least \$4.93. Of the 121, a total of 101 were Democrats, although neither Albert nor Mills was in this group.

In the Senate on March 16, 28 senators led by Gaylord Nelson (Dem-Wis.), who represents a state with a huge dairy industry, introduced legislation to force a dairy price rise to at least \$4.93. Only one of the 28 was a Republican, Marlow W. Cook (Rep-Ky.).

The 27 Democrats included men such as Birch Bayh (Ind.), Alan Cranston (Calif.), John V. Tunney (Calif.), James Eastland (Miss.), J. William Fulbright (Ark.), Philip A. Hart (Mich.), Ernest F. Hollings (S.C.), George McGovern (S.D.), Walter Mondale (Minn.), William Proxmire (Wis.) and Stuart Symington (Mo.).

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A few weeks later, Nelson

boasted to the Senate that the President's decision to raise prices to \$4.93 "obviously was the result" of his bill, adding that Wisconsin dairy farmers were \$90 million richer as a consequence.

On March 17 Hubert H. Humphrey (Dem-Minn.) introduced a similar Senate bill of his own, declaring, "our dairy farmers need and rightly merit this help without delay." He added, "raising the milk support price will help assure an adequate and stable supply of milk. Our dairymen deserve a decent income and a reasonable return on their extensive investment and labor."

Senator Hart, one of those who sponsored the Nelson bill, said yesterday that he did so because "it was my understanding that dairy farmers' income was at a level that merited an increase."

Senator Tunney said: "My dairy industry in California was on its knees. If they didn't get greater support, they would have had to go out of business. On that basis, I supported the Nelson position."

Washington Post