

Dairy Co-op 'Draft-Mills' Effort Aired

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By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A leading official of the nation's biggest dairy co-op hoped to raise \$2 million to help elect Rep. Wilbur D. Mills (D-Ark.) President in 1972, according to statements in court records.

David Parr, formerly special counsel for the Associated Milk Producers, Inc., thought that Mills "could go all the way," the records state.

The milk producers had already pledged \$2 million for President Nixon's re-election campaign, allegedly in conjunction with a controversial 1971 increase in milk price supports. But the Texas-based co-op also maintained close ties to leading Democrats.

Mills was one of the leading congressional advocates of the 1971 increase in price supports. He is also a good friend of Parr, who ran the AMPI divisional offices in Little Rock, Ark.

"Dave Parr wanted to build a kitty for Wilbur Mills of \$2 million. He wanted this to be in cash," former AMPI lobbyist Bob A. Lilly said in one of the statements.

Parr "truly believed in the fall of 1971 that Mills could go all the way," Robert O. Isham, who was once controller for the giant co-op, was quoted as saying in another interview.

According to the statements, at least five workers on the AMPI payroll were assigned to help foster Mills' presidential ambitions. Corporate funds were also used to pay the rent on two Washington apartments in an early draft-Mills-for-President effort and, reportedly, to pay for Wilbur Mills bumper stickers.

AMPI general manager George L. Mehren has said he "stopped this stuff immediately" when he took over as the co-op's top executive in an early 1972 shakeup of the organization.

Mehren said he also turned down a payroll "checkoff" of AMPI employees that Parr had proposed to raise funds for the Mills campaign. Mehren said he "gave directions

that this was contrary to company policy and would not be allowed." Federal law prohibits the use of corporate funds for political campaigns.

In his statement, Isham recalled one large meeting of AMPI employees in Texas where Parr tried to "drum up financial support for Mills" by telling the co-op workers to contribute \$100 each and "then turn it in on their expense accounts." Subsequently, Isham said, a check-off form for \$50 was prepared for all AMPI field men before Mehren squelched the plan.

In vetoing it, Mehren said that "Parr reminded me that it was for Wilbur Mills and

See MILK, A10, Col. 1

MILK, From A1

that we owed him a good deal."

Mills has said he was unaware of any corporate contributions for his campaign and "didn't know anything in the world" about the arrangements for the draft-Mills effort.

The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Mills never waged more than a low-key, long-shot campaign for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination. But the biggest contribution to it, aside from AMPI's early-bird corporate expenditures, was \$25,000 in June of 1972 from AMPI's political arm, the Committee for Thorough Agricultural Political Education (C-TAPE).

The statements about the effort for Mills were compiled by the Little Rock law firm of Edward L. Wright, a former American Bar Association president who was commissioned by AMPI's board of directors to investigate the co-op's political dealings. Wright's work papers were subpoenaed by the Justice Department in conjunction with a civil suit against AMPI.

According to the Wright report, the co-op also helped finance the activities of the Arkansas Voter Registration Association (later the National Voter Registration Association), which was said to have been organized by Mills and a Little Rock accountant. One AMPI employee assigned to the Association said she was told by "Dave Parr and the rest of them" to work on drafting Mills for President.