

Butz Hints Nixon Backers In Congress Get Priority

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WASHINGTON, June 3—Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz said today that he found himself "playing pretty closely" with those Congressmen who support President Nixon against impeachment.

Mr. Butz's statement, made in response to questions at a news conference, was the first public acknowledgement by a high-level member of the Administration of a trend that has been apparent for some time—that policies and actions by the executive branch are frequently shaped to appeal to the pro-Nixon conservative bloc in Congress.

He was asked whether, in administering his department, he was under pressure from the White House to play impeachment politics and favor the Nixon conservatives. He replied he was not.

Then, however, he praised the President at length, saying he was indebted to Mr. Nixon and believes in him.

"I make assessments myself," he said, "as to who our friends are on the Hill."

"I do not go out of the way to favor those who are against us," Dr. Butz said.

He pointed out that "some of the President's best friends" were Southern Democrats who "believe in the Presidency," and said, "I find myself play-

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ing pretty closely with some of these people."

Asked if this applied to the awarding of Federal grants, Dr. Butz said it referred to the White House's permitting favored members of Congress to announce Federal grants, but his over-all remarks indicated he was speaking in a broader context of policy.

Mr. Nixon himself has made no secret of his favoring the conservative bloc, largely Southern Democrats and Western Republicans. 29 MAY

Last Wednesday, for example, Mr. Nixon took 11 House members for a dinner cruise on the Presidential yacht, the Sequoia, he had taken another group on May 14. The group on Wednesday was composed of five Southern Democrats Omar Burleson of Texas, Gillespie V. Montgomery of Mississippi, Otto E. Passman of Louisiana, Robert L. F. Sikes of Florida and W. C. Daniel of Virginia — and six Republicans — Barber B. Conable Jr. and John W. Wyder, both of New York, Edward J. Derwinski of Illinois, William L. Dickinson of Alabama, Craig Hosmer of California and Dan H. Kuykendall of Tennessee.

White House Explains Purpose

A White House spokesman said the purpose of the cruise was for the President to "get together with a group of friends" and to discuss "whatever matters the members want to discuss."

Dr. Butz, appearing before a group of reporters in the offices of the White House communications director, Ken W. Clawson, said that he had been traveling widely recently and had met with farmers and farm industry groups. He said that he had detected "a very strong base of support" for Mr. Nixon.

The pro-Nixon sentiment among these groups, he said, was not as strong as it was in 1972 when the President won more than 70 per cent of their vote. But he estimated that support now "would go well above 60 per cent."