

Nixon Defends Brennan In Minimum-Wage Dispute

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By PHILIP SHABECOFF APR 17 1973
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WASHINGTON, April 16 — President Nixon came to the defense today of his Secretary of Labor, Peter J. Brennan, who has been under heavy attack from organized labor for supporting the Administration's new minimum wage legislation.

At a legislative conference of the building and construction trades unions, out of whose ranks Mr. Brennan came last year, the President said that the Labor Secretary had fought unsuccessfully for labor's position in opposition to a sub-minimum wage for youth. But "Peter Brennan is a team player and he knows that you can't win them all," the President said.

Later at the same conference, George Meany, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., renewed his attack on Mr. Brennan for supporting the Administration's \$3 minimum wage package and said, "I want to make it perfectly clear that Pete's performance was a disappointment to me—ahock." In a reference to Mr. Brennan's trade union background, Mr. Meany said, "If Pete is a team player he will have to admit he can't be on two competing teams."

Sellout Denied

Later in the day Mr. Brennan spoke in his own defense to his former union colleagues, saying that he had presented the minimum wage bill as a member of the Cabinet, not as an individual, and that he had put

up a fight on the issue in Cabinet meetings.

"The day I sell out I resign as Secretary of Labor, that's a promise," Mr. Brennan said. "If you think I should resign," he told his hard-hat audience, "let's hear from you."

The Administration's proposals would raise the minimum wage from the current \$1.60 an hour to \$2.30 an hour in four installments. It would permit a lower minimum wage to be paid to workers 19 years of age or younger.

President Nixon, noting that Mr. Brennan had lost his argument on the minimum wage legislation, said that the Labor Secretary had prevailed in arguing for a ceiling on meat prices against Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butts, who opposed the capping. In this Cabinet you win some and you lose some," Mr. Nixon said.

'Toughest Decision'

Mr. Nixon praised the construction workers for supporting his foreign policies, particularly his decisions to invade Cambodia in 1970, to mine Haiphong harbor last May and to resume the bombing of North Vietnam last December, which he said was "the toughest decision I made as President."

Had it not been for those decisions, the President declared, "our prisoners of war would still be in Hanoi." The President also said that he must maintain a high level of defense spending to be in



President Nixon waving after he spoke to a legislative conference of the building and construction trade unions in Washington. At right is Labor Secretary Peter J. Brennan.

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a position to bargain with the Soviet Union and China on the mutual reduction of conventional and nuclear arms.

"It is essential, if we're going to make any kind of deal with them, that to get anything from them you have got to have something to give," the President said.

'Responsibility for Sabotage'

He added that those who would unilaterally cut defense spending "would take responsibility for sabotaging" peace negotiations and blocking further arms reductions.

Mr. Nixon reiterated his intention of holding Federal spending to \$286-billion this year. "It's no pleasure for the President of the United States to veto spending bills and, after all, it isn't my money, it's yours," he told the audience of about 4,000 building and construction trade unionists at the Washington Hilton hotel.

The President said that he was vetoing spending bills so that the public would not have to pay higher taxes or face inflation. Mr. Nixon did not mention

rising prices in his speech. This omission was pointed out by Mr. Meany, the leader of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Economic Policies Decried

"It's fortunate I happened to drop in and find out the country is in great shape," Mr. Meany said sarcastically of Mr. Nixon's speech. The labor leader said that Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the President's economic stabilization program "were all complete and miserable failures."