

# Teamsters and the White House

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The political alliance between the Teamsters Union and the White House was first apparent on June 21, 1971, when President Nixon walked into a Teamster executive board meeting at the Playboy Plaza hotel in Miami Beach and sat down next to the newly elected union president — Frank Fitzsimmons.

The group held a 45-minute closed door discussion.

News photographers were permitted to take pictures of Mr. Nixon and Fitzsimmons together and presidential press secretary Ronald Ziegler quoted Mr. Nixon as saying: "My door is always open to President Fitzsimmons and that is the way it should be."

At the Teamsters convention on July 5, 1971, James D. Hodgson, who was Mr. Nixon's labor secretary, praised the Teamsters and said:

"I know you may have felt a little isolated from some of the mainstream in the past, but I think this is changing. Doors are opening in the labor department and other agencies and the White House, and we in the labor department mean to do our best to keep them open."

**DOORS**

Doors to the Justice Department had been opened, too, and pressure was brought there, as well as at the White House to free James Hoffa, the long-time Teamsters president who

had stepped down in favor of Fitzsimmons as part of a plan to seek parole from federal prison.

Hoffa was serving a 13-year sentence for pension fund fraud and jury tampering.

On Dec. 23, 1971, four months after the U.S. Parole Board had rejected Hoffa's parole application for the third time, President Nixon commuted Hoffa's sentence. Commutation had been recommended by Attorney General Mitchell and White House counsel Charles W. Colson. Colson later left the White House to join the Washington law firm of Morin, Dickstein, Shapiro and Galligan. And Fitzsimmons transferred the teamsters' \$200,000 a year legal business to that law firm.

Mr. Nixon's commutation order prohibited Hoffa from engaging in direct or indirect management of any labor organization prior to March 6, 1980 — a provision to the liking of Fitzsimmons who wanted to continue in his \$125,000 a year post without fear of Hoffa seeking to regain the office upon his release.

Hoffa expressed gratitude to the President for the act of clemency. And six weeks after his release, in answer to a question on a national television program, he said:

"I would say President Nixon is the best qualified man at the present time for the presidency of the United States in my own personal opinion."

Meanwhile, the close relationship between the Teamsters president and Mr. Nixon flourished.

Four other representatives of organized labor on the president's Wage and Price Board resigned in protest over Mr. Nixon's economic policies. But Fitzsimmons remained, the only labor representative on the board.

Mr. Nixon appointed Fitzsimmons to the board of directors of the Communications Satellite Corp., and Fitzsimmons' wife was named to serve on the arts committee of the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts.

On July 17, 1972, with presidential election campaigns in full swing, Fitzsimmons and his executive board met at La Costa country club.

To hardly anyone's surprise, they threw the support of the two-million member Teamsters Union — largest in the nation — behind Mr. Nixon's re-election efforts.

It was the first time the giant union had endorsed a GOP presidential campaign.

## OFFICIALS

Fitzsimmons also asked other teamster officials to contribute money to the president's re-election campaign. A recent incomplete tabulation of Teamster officials' contributions to the Committee for the Re-Election of the President showed \$55,000, including \$4,000 from Fitzsimmons.

But that figure was far from complete. The final tabulation, based on instructions for officials to contribute \$1,000 each, could run as high as \$250,000.

Teamster officials in Los Angeles and San Francisco told the Los Angeles Times that Fitzsimmons or other

officials had told them to contribute \$1,000 each. This was later reduced to \$500.

Fitzsimmons also accepted a position as a national vice chairman of Democrats for Nixon, a group financed by the President's re-election Committee and headed by ex-governor John B. Connally of Texas.

Earlier, while serving as Mr. Nixon's treasury secretary, Connally approved an Internal Revenue Service plan to give former teamsters union president Dave Beck of Seattle, Wash., a moratorium on paying \$1.3 million in back taxes.

## TAX

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer charged that although under a federal tax court judgment the tax was due and immediately collectible through seizure of Beck's properties, Connally arranged a deal in exchange for Teamster support of the Nixon administration's economic policy.

"Beck's tax break was negotiated by John B. Connally, who resigned suddenly (May 16, 1972) as secretary of the treasury after the Post-Intelligencer began delving into administration links with the Teamsters," the newspaper declared.

Part of the deal, negotiated in 1971 by Fitzsimmons, also called for a review of Hoffa's prison sentence, the newspaper said.

Connally, who recently returned to the Nixon administration as an unpaid assistant to the president, did not comment on the newspaper report at the time, and the White House said that he is out of the country now and unavailable for comment.