

J. J. Kilpatrick

We Needed Candor Then, Need It Now

PUT ASIDE, for the moment, all that is embraced in the agonizing name of "Watergate," and consider two other matters instead: the matter of the dairy fund, and the matter of the "improvements" to Mr.

Nixon's home in San Clemente.



James J. Kilpatrick

These are the skeleton facts of the first matter: Early in 1971, the dairy industry applied to the Department of Agriculture for an increase in federal price supports. On March 1, 1971, the then Secretary of Agriculture, Clifford Hardin, rejected the request. The industry thereupon launched a strenuous lobbying campaign that culminated with a meeting at the White House on March 23 with the President himself. A day earlier, on

March 22, the industry contributed \$10,000 to a dummy committee subsequently linked to the Nixon campaign.

On March 25, Hardin reversed himself and approved an increase in the price support from \$4.66 to \$4.93 a hundredweight. The increase added \$500 to \$700 million to the income of dairy farmers. The industry thereafter contributed an additional \$412,500 to the Nixon campaign and to the GOP.

★ ★ ★

THESE ARE the skeleton facts on the second matter: Between July 1, 1969, and May 31, 1973, the General Services Administration expended some \$703,000 in public funds on what it terms "improvements" to the house and grounds of the President's Western White House at San Clemente. Over roughly this same period, the GSA spent some \$580,000 on "improvements" to the presidential complex at Key Biscayne.

In hearings before a House committee headed by Tom Steed of Oklahoma, the Secret Service last month defended the \$1,283,000 as necessary to protect the security of the President. Critics have scoffed that some of the elaborate and costly landscaping itemized by the GSA has only the most tenuous relationship to presidential security, and they ask why the taxpayers should be charged for such non-security items as "pillows, decorative, \$86," in the President's office.

These are serious matters. The first carries an implication of bribery or extortion; the second suggests old-fashioned graft.

★ ★ ★

LET ME insert a personal note: From what I know of the dairy industry—and I have made my home for seven years in cattle country—I can well believe the dairy industry had a convincing case to support the increase asked in 1971. My guess is that industry spokesmen submitted such overwhelming evidence on March 23 that the reversal of March 25 was wholly justified. Such reversals occur regularly in the appellate processes of our courts, and we ought not to be surprised by them.

The insinuation of graft at San Clemente leaves me equally unimpressed. The Secret Service takes the same view of presidential security that generals take of their troops: Ten times enough is still not enough. I can well believe the Service insisted upon these "improvements." To complain of the pillows is to set a record of pettiness. This is also Steed's view, and the onetime newsman, now 69, has been around the House for 24 years.

★ ★ ★

WHAT HAS been the White House reaction? White House counsel Leonard Garment, claiming executive privilege, flatly refused to release 67 relevant memoranda on the dairy case. To make the papers public (in response to a prospective subpoena) "would be injurious to the public interest and to the constitutional doctrine of the separation of powers." On the matter of the "improvements," the White House press secretary has provided, out of his fountains of disbelief, whole showers of conflicting figures.

It won't do. By his foolish insistence on "executive privilege," a most doubtful doctrine where crime is alleged, the President creates an inescapable inference of wrongdoing in the dairy matter. He could clear up the questions of San Clemente by demanding a full investigation by the General Accounting Office. Mr. Nixon could dispel great clouds of unanswered Watergate questions—if only he would. We must have candor, candor, and still more candor! We are not getting it now.

Washington Star