

Democrats Pushed for Milk Prices

By Spencer Rich

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House and Senate records confirm President Nixon's contention that he was under massive Democratic pressure for a dairy price increase in 1971, when he ordered a controversial boost in government milk price supports.

Mr. Nixon has been accused of reversing himself and raising dairy price supports from \$4.66 a hundred-weight to \$4.93 on March 26, 1971, in return for pledges of political contributions from dairy industry organizations which subsequently

gave \$427,500 to his campaign.

According to Rep. Robin Beard (R-Tenn.), Mr. Nixon, questioned about this change in meetings with congressmen earlier this week, said Democrats on Capitol Hill, led by Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.), House speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), were the ones who exerted the most pressure for the dairy price boost.

Records of the period show that congressional Democrats were pressing the President sharply for a

dairy price increase. From one end of Capitol Hill to the other, Democratic senators and House members repeatedly demanded that the President reverse a March 12 decision to keep dairy supports at \$4.66, and boost them to \$4.93 or more.

Between March 12 and March 26, when Mr. Nixon decided to raise the price to \$4.93, 121 members of the House introduced legislation requiring a dairy boost to at least \$4.93. Of the 121, 101 were Democrats, although neither Albert nor Mills was in this group.

In the Senate on March

16, 28 senators led by Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), who represents a state with a huge dairy industry, introduced legislation forcing a dairy price rise to at least \$4.93. Only one of the 28 was a Republican, Marlow W. Cook (R-Ky.).

The 27 Democrats included men like Birch Bayh (Ind.), Alan Cranston (Calif.), John V. Tunney (Calif.), James O. Eastland (Miss.), J.W. Fulbright (Ark.), Philip A. Hart (Mich.), Ernest F.

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Connally says he refused to discuss money with milk producers. Page A31.

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Hollings (S.C.), George McGovern (S.D.), Walter Mondale (Minn.), William Proxmire (Wis.), and Stuart Symington (Mo.).

A few weeks later, Nelson boasted to the Senate that the President's decision to raise prices to \$4.93 "obviously was the result" of his bill, adding that Wisconsin dairy farmers were \$90 million richer as a consequence.

On March 17, Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) introduced a similar Senate bill, declaring, "Our dairy farmers need and rightly merit this help without delay." He added, "Raising the milk support price will help assure an adequate and stable supply of milk. Our dairy men deserve a decent income and a reasonable re-

turn on their extensive investment and labor."

Senator Hart, one of those who sponsored the Nelson bill, said yesterday that he did so because "it was my understanding that dairy farmers' income was at level that merited an increase."

Senator Tunney said, "My dairy industry in California was on its knees. If they didn't get greater support, they would have had to go out of business. On that basis, I supported the Nelson position."

House sponsors of the \$4.93-or-better bill read like a "Who's Who" of the Democratic Midwestern roster from Texas to the Canadian border.

They include House Appropriations Committee Chairman George Mahon (Tex.), Agriculture Committee chairman W. R. Poage

(Tex.), Veterans Committee Chairman Olin Teague (Tex.), Banking Committee Chairman Wright Patman (Tex.), and Al Ullman (Ore.), second-ranking Democrat on Ways and Means.

The fact that these powerful Democrats were demanding price increases neither proves nor disproves charges that Mr. Nixon reversed himself after a March 23 White House meeting with dairy spokesmen. Pledges of \$2 million had been promised earlier. But it does substantiate Mr. Nixon's contention that he was under heavy Democratic pressure for the increase from congressmen who, in many cases, were the recipients of dairy industry campaign fund largesse.

This story was prepared with the aid of Washington Post researcher Pat Davis.