

Lawyer in Nader Suit Gets Tape Of Nixon Meeting on Milk Price

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The White House has turned over a tape recording of a 1971 meeting between President Nixon and dairy industry leaders to an attorney contesting a controversial increase in milk price supports.

White House lawyers had initially indicated that no recording was made of the March 23, 1971, session but the President's special counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt, said it turned up as the result of a more painstaking search required by the litigation.

Mr. Nixon met with leaders of the Associated Milk Producers Inc. and other big dairy farm co-ops during the course of an intensive 1971 lobbying campaign for higher price supports. They had been rejected by then-Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin, but Hardin reversed himself two days after the White House meeting and approved the increase.

Ralph Nader and several

consumer groups have challenged the increase in a lawsuit charging that it was a payoff for dairy industry contributions to the President's re-election. At the time the increase was granted, AMPI, acting through a newly hired Republican law firm, had already promised Mr. Nixon \$2 million for his 1972 campaign.

The White House turned over the tape of the March 23 meeting in the Cabinet Room to the attorney pressing the lawsuit, William A. Dobrovir. But the President's lawyers are still claiming executive privilege for the tape of a subsequent meeting that the President held the same day with Hardin and other top administration officials.

The tape of that session, held in the Oval Office after the dairy co-op leaders had been given their audience, has been submitted to U.S. District Judge William B. Jones for secret inspection.

Hardin told The Washington Post in October that dairy industry political contributions "may have" been mentioned at the meeting in the Oval Office, but maintained that "it wasn't pertinent" to the discussion of higher price supports.

AMPI's \$2 million pledge was made in a Dec. 16, 1970, letter to the President from attorney Patrick J. Hillings, a longtime friend and once a congressional aide of Mr. Nixon. Dobrovir, who is seeking a deposition from Hillings, has been notified that Hillings is now being represented by Murray Chotiner, an old Nixon confidant. Chotiner also helped AMPI lobby for the

higher 1971 price supports.

Copies of the tapes of both March 23 meetings at the White House have apparently been turned over by now to Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski, who is conducting his own investigation of the Nixon campaign's "milk money." AMPI and two other dairy farm co-ops contributed a reported \$427,500 for the President's re-election.

The AMPI contributions stopped after a 1972 leadership upheaval within the organization and the Justice Department's subsequent filing of a civil antitrust suit against the big co-op.

Dobrovir said yesterday that he has yet to listen to the tape of the Cabinet Room meeting and had no comment on it. He said he had just returned from California, where he took a deposition from the President's personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach.

Kalmbach was secretly handed \$100,000 in cash in 1969 in an initial AMPI effort "to get a more sympathetic understanding within this administration," according to an attorney involved in that transaction. The payment was separate from the \$427,500 in contributions which did not begin to flow into Nixon campaign coffers until the day before the 1971 meetings at the White House.

The President said at a news conference last month that the administration approved the increased 1971 price supports only because congressional Democrats "put a gun to our head" by introducing legislation for an even larger increase.