

Why Probers Want

Washington *NYT*

Investigators for the House Judiciary Committee have apparently constructed a chain of circumstantial evidence that they contend links President Nixon's decision in 1971 to raise government milk price supports to a pledge by dairy industry groups to give \$2 million to the President's 1972 campaign for re-election.

The circumstantial chain was outlined in one of several documents submitted to the White House by committee lawyers on April 19 to justify the panel's request for documents and tape recordings of 141 White House conversations sought for the impeachment inquiry.

The committee documents

were obtained yesterday by the New York Times.

The committee brief also asserted that former Treasury Secretary John Connally had "stressed the dairy industry's potential for making political contributions" in urging the President to increase the milk price supports.

Connally has publicly denied any improprieties in his efforts to secure a more favorable price level for dairymen.

The items requested by the committee on April 19 included tape recordings of 75 discussions bearing on the alleged Watergate coverup, 20 conversations related to the controversial 1971 settlement of government anti-trust action against the In-

ternational Telephone and Telegraph Corp., and 46 discussions concerning the milk price decision.

Mr. Nixon acknowledged last January that he had taken into account "traditional political considerations" in raising the price support level, but he categorically denied that he had been influenced by pledges of campaign funds.

The committee document, suggesting that the 46 tapes on the milk price matter might affirm or rebut Mr. Nixon's explanation, cited "material in possession of the committee" as the source of the following chain of events:

● On March 3, 1971, Mr. Nixon met in the White House with representatives

of dairy cooperatives. The committee documents said the President "stated his gratitude for dairy organizations' support" and that, while not necessarily mentioning it, Mr. Nixon "had previously been informed" of the \$2 million campaign pledge.

● Later the same day, aides, including former White House domestic adviser John Ehrlichman, discussed "the political and financial support of dairy interests, as well as congressional pressure" to help the dairy industry.

The Judiciary Committee brief said that after Mr. Nixon announced to the aides he would raise the price support level, there was a discussion about someone at the meeting advising

'Milk' Tapes

Charles Colson, then a White House special counsel who dealt with various interest groups.

● Immediately after the March 23 meeting, Ehrlichman "contacted Colson, who then contacted" Murray Chotiner. Chotiner died last January 30 of injuries suffered in an automobile accident. In 1971 he was a former White House political adviser and a lobbyist for, among others, dairy industry groups.

● On March 23 dairy industry officials "engaged in all-night meetings" — one of which the committee document said occurred in Louisville, Ky. — and agreed to make a \$25,000 gift to Mr. Nixon's campaign by the next night.

● Late on March 24, Chotiner told "several dairymen," the committee staff's account continued, "that Mr. Ehrlichman expected the dairy industry to reaffirm its \$2 million 'commitment' in light of a forthcoming increase in milk price supports." According to the document, "the dairy leaders did so."

● A day later, on March 25, the Nixon administration officially announced that the price support level would be increased.

(The Associated Press reported yesterday that milk-producer lobbyist Bob Lilly attended a meeting April 4, 1972, at which top milk producer executives told him that "there was a prior commitment of money

made in conjunction with the 1971 price support.

("The commitment was made in March of 1971" by the top milk executives, Lilly said in a statement.)

The significance of the requested tapes was apparent.

They could, if available, clear Mr. Nixon of any impropriety or provide the basis for an allegation of bribery. The Constitution specifies that an official may be impeached for "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

A White House spokesman declined further comment yesterday on the milk price support decision. The spokesman said that Mr. Nixon's position was outlined in the statement he issued in January.