

Congressman Agrees He Lied in Milk Memo

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Rep. James R. Jones (D-Okla.), in a memo that he now describes as pure fiction, wrote the milk producers that he got President Johnson to approve a lame-duck decision on milk price supports at a time when the dairy lobby was trying to hire Jones as one of its lawyers.

Jones was President Johnson's appointments secretary before he left the White House in January, 1969, and joined the milk year retainer.

On Dec. 26, 1968, departing Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman announced that milk price supports would be continued at the then-prevailing level of \$4.28 a hundredweight through President Nixon's first year in office.

Jones acknowledged yesterday that he wrote a memo in 1972 to Associated Milk Producers, Inc., in which he claimed credit for the decision. But he said it was simply a "tall story" made up in protest over AMPI's plans to terminate his employment.

"The politically smart thing to do would be to say nothing," the 35-year-old congressman declared of the note. "The facts are that that milk price decision didn't even come to the President."

Jones said he was suffering from the flu and "dizzy on some super drug" his doctor had given him when he wrote the memo.

He said the lame-duck decision was not binding on the incoming Nixon administration in any event and could have been reversed before the new milk marketing year started April 1, 1969.

The Jones memo was released yesterday among the evidence compiled by the Senate Watergate Committee in its investigation of the milk producers' political dealings.

In the note, Jones said that AMPI's top officials, Harold S. Nelson and David L. Parr offered to hire him "early in December 1968 according to the notes from my files." He said Parr and Nelson were also anxious at the time to have President Johnson set milk price supports at \$4.28 for the year after he left office.

The congressman's memo said that he and then-White House aide DeVier Pierson encountered "some pretty stiff foot-dragging" from the Agriculture Department but

finally got officials there to send over a recommendation.

"The President refused to sign it," Jones wrote. "Finally after two conversations with him (by me), he did sign (that is, authorize Agriculture to make the announcement on Dec. 26). That happened while we were on our way to the Ranch after spending Christmas Day at the White House."

Jones went to work for AMPI as a \$40,000-a-year lawyer and editor of the co-op's monthly Dairymen's Digest which he produced out of his law offices in Tulsa. He also billed the co-op for extra time worked and according to court records, received a total of \$155,050 before newly appointed AMPI general manager George L. Mehren dropped him on Jan. 31, 1972.

Notified of the plans earlier that month, Jones wrote the protest memo to Mehren Jan. 18, 1972, in which he said he had "a gentlemen's agreement" from AMPI for a five-year retainer.

However, he followed up on Jan. 26, 1972, with a more formal letter to Mehren stating that he had "been virtually incapacitated because of a devastating bout

of flu" and, as a result, "the memo which I started to draft last week may have seemed a bit incoherent.

"It was typed while I was under the influence of medication which left me dizzy and forced me to leave the office early," Jones added. "Out of an excess of zeal and a misunderstanding, my assistant mailed it instead of bringing it home to me for completion and editing."

Jones, elected to Congress in 1972, said yesterday that other statements in the earlier memo were inaccurate. For example, he said that his "best recollection" is

that Nelson and Parr did not approach him about going to work for AMPI until January of 1969, after Freeman's announcement.

The former LBJ aide said he did not know what prompted Freeman to make the lame-duck decision but Jones guessed that incoming Nixon Administration officials might have invited it to avoid "the heat" of making the determination themselves after only a couple of months in office.

In any event, Jones said the memo was "just inaccurate. My Conscience is good."

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REP. JAMES R. JONES

... "a tall story"