

'Welfare Queen' Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 14—Few people realize it, but Linda Taylor, a 47-year-old Chicago welfare recipient, has become a major campaign issue in the New Hampshire Republican Presidential primary.

Former Gov. Ronald Reagan of California has referred to her at nearly every stop, using her as part of his "citizens' press conference" format.

"There's a woman in Chicago," the Republican candidate said recently to an audience in Gilford, N.H., during his free-swinging attack on welfare abuses. "She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands." He added:

"And she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over \$150,000."

Hitting a Nerve

Mr. Reagan never mentions the woman by name. But the effect is the same wherever he goes. During his second campaign swing through the state last month, for example, he startled people in Dublin and Jaffrey and Peterborough and Salem and in all the other little towns where he appeared. They were angry at "welfare chislers." Mr. Reagan had hit a nerve.

The problem is that the story does not quite check out.

According to the welfare authorities in Illinois, Mr. Reagan has based his anecdotes on newspaper accounts of Miss Taylor, who became known in the headlines as the "welfare queen" after sensational disclosures about her case were made by state Senator Don A. Moore, chairman of a committee that has been investigating alleged welfare abuses.

A spokesman for the committee said the story was not quite as exciting as Mr. Reagan put it. "We figure she [Miss Taylor] probably made between \$100,000 and \$150,000 during the year we checked," he said, "but we could never be sure because the Welfare Department wouldn't cooperate with us."

And, according to James Piper, the assistant state's attorney who is prosecuting Miss Taylor, the story is not even as exciting as that.

Now 4 Aliases

After a series of indictments each one of which was replaced by another indictment, winnowing down the number of charges, Miss Taylor is now charged with using not 80 aliases but four. The amount the state is charging that she received from her alleged fraud is not \$150,000 but \$8,000.

"You have to go with what you can prove," Mr. Piper said. And so far, nobody has proven anything, he added, because Miss Taylor is still awaiting trial.

The "welfare queen" item in Mr. Reagan's repertoire is one of several that seem to be at

odds with the facts. The former California Governor fairly bristles with what he calls facts, figures and statistics demonstrating what he thinks is wrong with welfare, Big Government and the United States.

The national press entourage following Mr. Reagan usually is prevented from pinning him down on the specifics because his citizens' press conferences are reserved for questions for local audiences.

Items in Notebook

The following items were taken from a reporter's notebook after attending 18 citizens' press conferences on Jan. 15, 16 and 17, all of them in small towns in southern New Hampshire:

Mr. Reagan usually praises his welfare reform program in California. "We lopped 400,000 off the welfare rolls," he asserted at several stops.

According to a spokesman for California's Department of Benefit Payments, the state's highest welfare case load was 2,292,945 cases in March 1971, six months before Mr. Reagan's welfare reform package became law. The only provable low point during the subsequent period is a level of 2,060,875 cases reached in January 1975, the month after Mr. Reagan left office, making it a total of 232,070 who were "lopped" off the rolls.

After first noting that his audience is composed of "hard-working people" who pay their bills and put up with high taxes, Mr. Reagan frequently tells them about Taino Towers, a four-building subsidized housing project in New York City. "If you are a slum dweller," Mr. Reagan says, "you can get an apartment with 11-foot ceilings, with a 20-foot balcony, a swimming pool and gymnasium, laundry room and play room, and the rent begins at \$113.20 and that includes utilities."

According to Robert Nichol, project coordinator for the development, which is in a primarily Puerto Rican section of East Harlem, only 92 of 656 units in the development have 11-foot ceilings. These are the six-bedroom units for large families and the high ceiling—which is only over the kitchen and living room—is to allow a space configuration that saves what would otherwise be wasted corridor space. There is no way, Mr. Nichol said, that anyone could get such an apartment for \$113.20. The going rent would either be \$450 a month or one-fourth of a family's income. The large family that would need such a unit, he added, would probably receive enough welfare benefits so that its rent would work out to about \$300 a month.

If New Hampshire residents decided to move to New York and live in Taino Towers, Mr. Nichol continued, they would find that they have to share the pool, gymnasium and other amenities with the community of 200,000 Puerto Ricans and blacks who live around the project, because these amenities were built for community use.