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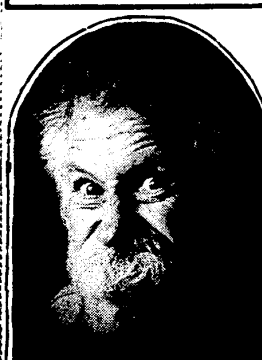
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# Nickles used to nudge consumer agency bill

By GLENN BUNTING

When Kathleen O'Reilly graduated from law school, the last thing to which she aspired was the life of a bureaucracy-fighter. But after experiencing the monotony of processing corporate legal work ("There are only so many ways to walk in front of a moving bus"), she has never regretted the move, albeit accidental, to her present position.

Testifying before Congressional committees, fighting the financial fists of big business, and flying to major cities to wage media campaigns—all are a part of Ms. O'Reilly's new life-style as executive director of the Consumer Federation of America (CFA). Ms. O'Reilly, whose parents Jim and Lillian live on Joann Lane in Plymouth, doesn't call herself a bureaucracy-fighter, but she might as well be. Her role as CFA director pits her against some of the most powerful men in the country; both in business and government.

The top priority of the CFA is to fight for the creation of a federal consumer protection agency. Ms. O'Reilly says such an agency is badly needed because of a lack of consumer representation in the governmental decision making process.

SO MS. O'REILLY'S GROUP is making an all-out pitch to persuade Congress. An identical bill to set up an agency was introduced in 1969 and passed both houses in 1975.

The bill, however, never became law. It never reached President Gerald Ford's oval office because of his repeated threats to veto it, according to Ms. O'Reilly. "He was responding to his political buddies," Ms. O'Reilly said of the former president. "It was an example of peer politics in the worse sense of the word."

This time, though, the CFA has the support of the administration. Presi-

dent Jimmy Carter has gone on record as saying he is in favor of the establishment of a consumer protection agency "to focus the consumer's interest in one agency as much as possible."

The only opposition is big business, which, according to Ms. O'Reilly, wants to protect its dominant relationship with federal regulatory agencies. And Ms. O'Reilly says business opponents are pulling out every stop; spending record amounts of time and money to kill the consumer agency bill.

TO COUNTER the expenditures of its opposition, the CFA has started a "nickel campaign," reflecting the annual cost per citizen for the operation of a consumer champion in Washington.

The nickel campaign published a target list last week of the names of 78 congressmen who have not publicly supported the consumer bill. The CFA is asking consumers to send a nickel to their Congressmen as a symbolic vote in favor of the bill.

The campaign has already influenced a pair of representatives from Tennessee and Florida, who both declared their support of the measure after their offices were barged with nickels.

Included on the target list is U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth), who, Ms. O'Reilly said, should receive more than 500 nickels this week. She is working with local volunteers through Saturday in front of Plymouth shopping centers urging persons to write Pursell.

Phase two of the nickel campaign will begin next week and focus on a different set of representatives, including William Broomfield (R-West Bloomfield).

THE REASON WHY representatives are not supporting the consumer

bill is because they are responding to the needs of major campaign contributors, not constituents, according to Ms. O'Reilly. The problem is particularly severe with freshmen and sophomore congressmen, like Pursell, who have never dealt with an issue before involving such pressure from big business, Ms. O'Reilly said.

Pursell could not be reached for comment.

Ms. O'Reilly says she expects the bill to win handsily in the senate. She says U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle (D-Mich.) supports the measure, while U.S. Sen. Robert Griffin (R-Mich.) is hopeless.

Other supporters of the consumer agency are Ralph Nader, Common Cause, the United Auto Workers and the National Council of Senior Citizens. Opponents include Exxon, General Motors, Procter & Gamble, Gulf Oil and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The purpose of the proposed consumer legislation is to present a consumer viewpoint in crucial cases coming before federal regulatory agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Because the cost of representing one party at a typical FDA hearing runs around \$40,000, Ms. O'Reilly says such consumer representation has so far been unaffordable.

The consumer agency will not be vested with the power to ban any products, but only to be a legal advocate for the consumer interest. Ms. O'Reilly said. It also would represent consumer concerns about high prices, harmful products and dishonest business practices.

There appears to be widespread public support for this legislation. A recent Louis Harris poll revealed an overwhelming 63 per cent majority in favor of the bill. Ms. O'Reilly says she expects the bill to reach the house floor before the August recess.

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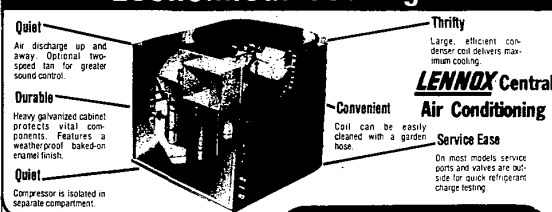
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