

Mondale Says Migrant Labor Gained Little Through Congress

WASHINGTON, March 21 (AP)—For two years, Senator Walter F. Mondale lent much of his legislative effort to a group he considers the most powerless in America today—the migrant farmworkers.

What did it get them?

“Not much,” Mr. Mondale reflects.

“I think our committee work may have affected the grape purchases by the Defense Department,” the Minnesota Democrat said in an interview.

“It was clear they dropped back after that.”

He referred to the Senate Migrant subcommittee's inquiry into the Defense Department's sudden sharp increase in grape purchases coinciding with a boycott of table grapes by striking Cesar Chavez and his United Farmworkers' Organizing Committee.

And there were legislative gains last year in getting farmworkers covered by an occupational hazards law, he said, but attempts to extend unemployment benefits to them were defeated. A manpower bill that would have helped retrain them was vetoed.

“We've got to realize how difficult it is to make progress in helping a powerless group which is politically, economically and socially unable to help itself,” Senator Mondale said.

He said that his experience as subcommittee chairman had convinced him that the following were vital to genuine improvement:

¶Drying up the stream of migrant workers, which means in turn controlling illegal entry at the United States-Mexican border.

¶Giving migrants themselves more say-so about the programs designed to help them.

¶Reserving at least 2 per cent of all future migrant-farmworker appropriations for lawyers' fees to help migrants force obedience to now-unenforced laws governing wages and other benefits.

Senator Mondale said the first thing that he learned



Associated Press
Senator Walter Mondale

when he took the subcommittee chairmanship was that people had been trying and failing to help migrants effectively for a half-century.

President Theodore Roosevelt got gory reports about conditions of Farmworkers, he said.

On Friday, the National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children released a survey of the three-year-old, \$97-million migrant education program and proclaimed that it had not dented indifference to and neglect of migrants on the part of cities and states.

The nonprofit committee noted that \$17-million of the budgeted Federal funds had been turned back unused by states, while children went hungry and untreated medically.

“Liberals can pass a law and go back to sleep but the migrant has to live that life every day,” Senator Mondale said.