

New Chairman of FCC Backs Agnew Charges

Burch Endorses Attack on TV Networks

By WALTER R. MEARS
 WASHINGTON (AP) — Dean Burch, new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, endorsed Friday Vice

President Spiro T. Agnew's charges of bias in network television newscasts, calling the criticisms thoughtful and provocative.

Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott not only agreed, he went Agnew one line better:

"I think the networks deserve a thorough goosing."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., said the Agnew speech was "an attack with the ultimate aim of dividing this country" on the issue of the Vietnam war. Agnew specifically assailed the way network analysts dealt with President Nixon's Nov. 3 address to the nation on Vietnam policy. Agnew said a majority of commentators "expressed in one way or another their hostility to what he had to say."

An FCC spokesman announced that Burch personally telephoned the chairmen of the three major television networks two days after the Nixon speech and asked for transcripts of the commentaries broadcast immediately afterward.

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS

The spokesman said Burch had received "a number of complaints from congressional and

other sources" about the commentaries.

"Vice President Agnew's comments last night on the television industry's news coverage were thoughtful, provocative and deserved careful consideration by the industry and the public," said Burch, a former Republican national chairman named by Nixon to head the agency which regulates broadcasting.

"I think it was especially noteworthy that the vice president emphasized that he was not calling for government censorship but greater public participation in examination of the networks' performance," Burch said in a statement.

NIXON WATCHED OUT

The White House said President Nixon watched on television Thursday night when Agnew discussed the networks and news at a regional Republican meeting in Des Moines, Iowa.

Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Nixon rarely watches television but switched on a set for the Agnew speech, which was carried live by all three major networks.

"The President has great confidence in his vice president and he supports his vice president in the office," Ziegler said.

Ziegler, half jokingly, said Nixon himself has not discussed news coverage since 1962, when he bitterly denounced the reporting of his losing campaign for governor of California.

WATCHING LAUNCH

The President and vice president flew separately to Cape Kennedy Friday to watch the blastoff of Apollo 12. They did not see each other until after the launch. Then they met at the control center.

Agnew greeted the President as Nixon alighted from an elevator on the third floor. Nixon introduced Agnew to the technicians there, and they gave the vice president a rousing round of applause.

While the FCC does not directly supervise the networks, it does have regulatory power because of its control over license renewal of broadcast stations owned by the networks or affiliated with them.

Burch is to appear before the Senate communications sub-

committee on Dec. 1 to testify on broadcast license renewal procedures; he may be questioned then about FCC network regulations.

TARGET OF ATTACK

One target of the Agnew attack was W. Averell Harriman, former U.S. negotiator at the Paris peace talks on Vietnam, and Democrats specifically protested that aspect of the speech. Harriman commented on the Nixon report on the American Broadcasting Co. Agnew said that was a "guarantee in advance that the President's plea for national unity would be challenged."

Kennedy said Agnew's remarks about Harriman were thoughtless. "To casually degrade this man's views and opinions is to dismiss some of the most significant and proud moments in our recent history," Kennedy said.

Said Sen. Stephen M. Young, D-Ohio:

"Those dim witted, unscrupulous, reckless speech writers in the White House presented the vice president with a vicious, irresponsible and untruthful assault on Averell Harriman which he recited perfectly."

REPUDIATION URGED

Young said if Nixon really wants to unite Americans, "he should immediately and forcefully repudiate the divisive remarks of his vice president."

ABC, CBS and NBC had no comment on the Burch statement. In reply to the Vice President Thursday night, the networks said their coverage had been fair and objective. CBS said it was "an unprecedented attempt by the Vice President to intimidate a news medium which depends for its existence upon government licenses." NBC called it "an appeal to prejudice."

NBC newsman Chet Huntley, commenting over NBC Radio, asked whether Agnew had "declared war on the press, radio and television of this country." He said Agnew apparently spoke for the President and recalled that after Nixon's defeat for the governorship of California in 1962 "he angrily assailed the press. No longer can that be classified as an isolated and forgotten incident. Here it is again."

"The piety of the three networks rings a little false to me," said Scott. "We have truth in advertising and truth in labeling. I think television might experiment with some straight news."

"I agree with Mr. Agnew's superior, who said we should lower our voices and bring our people together," said Sen. Mike Mansfield, the Democratic Leader from Montana.

SUPPORT FOR AGNEW

A random sampling of 21 radio and television stations indicated Thursday night callers had supported the Agnew criticism, more than 2 to 1.

ABC said it had received more than 4,000 calls in New York, with Agnew's stand favored 2 to 1.

Sen. Paul Fannin, R-Ariz., accused the networks of misrepresenting Agnew's position, noting that the vice president rejected censorship. "The plain fact is the vice president has applied the prod to a sacred cow and the bellowing is being heard across the land," Fannin said.

But Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif., said it is obvious that "the thoughtful analysis by re-

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porters of the vice president's sudden spate of startling pronouncements has gotten under his thin skin.

"I am confident that TV and radio reporters and commentators will not be frightened by the vice president into becoming mere mechanical attachments to their cameras and tape recorders, playing back automati-

cally and uncritically the pronouncements of people in power," Cranston said.

Sen. George Murphy, R-Calif., said Agnew had pointed out a concentration of power which "could become the greatest danger to the future of our democratic system of government." He said Agnew displayed courage, judgment and wisdom.