

## THE VICE PRESIDENT

Agnew Watches  
And Waits

What is Vice President Spiro Agnew doing these days? "Oh, he speaks a lot," says an Agnew aide. How often? "About twice a week." Another member of his staff adds the fascinating information that "he reads a lot." Declares a third: "Now he's got the time for a thoughtful approach to his job."

Agnew does indeed have the time, since his duties have been cut back by President Nixon, apparently as part of his drive to centralize authority within his own office. Agnew's new press aide, J. Marsh Thompson, cited as the most important among the Vice President's remaining jobs President of the Senate, chairman of the National Council on Indian Opportunity and a regent of the Smithsonian Institution. But Agnew rarely visits his office in the Senate; he usually goes to Capitol Hill only when his vote might be needed to break a tie or when he is called on to escort a foreign dignitary. Despite his Indian council post, he played no part in the sensitive Wounded Knee negotiations, and he rarely attends council meetings. Agnew aides note that he likes to keep busy, but one of them admitted: "He does have bad days. He'll say, 'What the hell am I doing? Why in hell am I handling this crap?'"

**Hostile.** Except for one trip to explain the Viet Nam peace settlement to U.S. allies in Asia, Agnew has not been given any significant diplomatic or advisory tasks by Nixon since their second terms began. Relations between the two men are at a low point. Agnew resents that Nixon—in a news conference in January and to various aides—has mentioned Democrat John Connally as a potential presidential candidate in 1976. He also feels that Nixon has seriously mishandled the entire Watergate political-espionage scandal, possibly hurting the Republican Party's—as well as Agnew's—prospects in future elections. Agnew's aides, moreover, regard such Nixon intimates as H.R. Haldeman, White House chief of staff, and John Ehrlichman, domestic affairs assistant, as hostile barriers standing between the President and the Vice President.

Agnew's duties were trimmed last January, when Nixon shifted the supervision of the Office of Intergovernmental Relations, which handles White House liaison with Governors and mayors, from Agnew to Ehrlichman's Domestic Policy Council. The shift was a mixed blessing, because the Vice President felt that Nixon had misled those elected officials into thinking that they were going to get more federal funds from his revenue-sharing programs than now seems likely—and Agnew has no desire to take the heat for this. Explains an Agnew spokesman: "It could

be awkward for the Vice President to continue as an advocate of Governors, mayors and county officials at a time when they might be in opposition to Administration policy."

Agnew's staff was slashed 23% (from 39 to 30) as part of Nixon's general Executive cost-cutting operation. The way in which this was done irked Agnew aides. His chief of staff, Arthur Sohmer, got the orders for cutback in a telephone call from Fred Malek, the second-ranking official in the Office of Management and Budget. "Do we have any choice?" Sohmer asked. "No," said Malek. That was that.

In some ways, Agnew's limited duties fit his desire to keep his profile low and let much of the controversy that has surrounded him abate while he assesses all the factors involved in whether—and how vigorously—he should seek the presidency. His intimates insist that he has not decided whether to reach for it. Some are not even sure that he wants the job. "He just doesn't give a toot," contends Harry Dent, counsel to the Republican National Committee. "He's got a lot of reluctance in him. He had to think a lot about going on the ticket again last fall."

There is in fact no solid sign that Agnew has developed the burning ambition that seems so vital to capturing the nation's highest office. So far, he is neither cultivating the people who could help him nor dropping those who might hurt him. In his speech forays, he often avoids reception lines, and he dislikes the handshaking and political chatter with influential regional politicians who will control many votes at the 1976 Republican National Convention. Moreover, he maintains a close friendship with Frank Sinatra (see PEOPLE), the high-living singer whose boorish conduct at Nixon's Inauguration festivities angered many top Republicans. Agnew and his wife Judy are frequent guests of Sinatra in Palm Springs, Calif. Granting one of his rare interviews, Agnew told the *Christian Science Monitor* that these visits are not "big partying occasions" and it is not true "that Frank Sinatra and I are going around raising hell together. I respect and admire him very much. And I'm not about to let any rumors interfere with my right to select my own friends." Quietly, Agnew has been visiting compatible intellectuals, possibly in search of stimulation on some of the deeper emerging national issues. They include Semanticist S.I. Hayakawa, Futurist Herman Kahn and Historian Daniel Boorstin.

There is of course ample time for Agnew to begin making his move if he does want the presidency. The fate of such recent front-running candidates as Democrat Edmund Muskie and Republican George Romney demonstrates the pitfalls in pushing too hard too soon. Agnew has said that he may not decide for another two years. But once John-come-lately Connally makes his expected shift to the Republican Party (apparently being delayed until the impact of the Watergate scandal is clearer), the pressure on Agnew to counter the Texan will grow.

Within the Republican Party it is almost a cliché that Agnew could win the nomination but not the election, while

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VICE PRESIDENT SPIRO AGNEW  
Plenty of time for thought.

Connally could win the election but would have a tough time getting the nomination. The Vice President may be wise in concentrating on golf and tennis, keeping his public speeches relatively muted and biding his time. He has indicated that he will no longer let himself be used by the President to make slashing political attacks unless he himself is in total agreement with the points in such speeches. Agnew speaks so rhapsodically about the joys of the good life in Palm Springs that some of his friends think that he might just chuck Washington completely when his term is over. For anyone who has been just one step away from the Oval Office, however, such a retreat is most unlikely. Just ask Hubert Humphrey—or Richard Nixon.