

Nixon Scores News Leaks

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President Nixon, strongly condemning news leaks concerning the federal investigation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, said yesterday he has asked Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson to conduct a full investigation into the source of the leaks.

The President, speaking one day after Agnew publicly demanded such an investigation and accused Justice Department officials of leaking information to the press, said any Justice Department employee found to be responsible for the leaks would be summarily dismissed from government service.

In Washington, Richardson reiterated yesterday that he is satisfied that neither the Justice Department nor the U.S. attorney's office in Baltimore is responsible for the leaks.

Through a department spokesman, Richardson also renewed his pledge to take every reasonable step . . . to assure that the Justice

Department has not been and will not be the source of such publicity."

The President's request for an investigation was relayed to Richardson by Gen. Alexander M. Haig, White House chief of staff, shortly before Mr. Nixon's press conference yesterday in San Clemente, Calif.

News leaks concerning the Agnew investigation have now been publicly denounced by the nation's two highest elected officials, clearly increasing the pressure on both Richardson and George Beall, the U.S. attorney for Maryland, to assure that their staffs are not the source of the leaks.

Beall informed Agnew on Aug. 2 that he was under investigation for possible violations of bribery, extortion, conspiracy and tax laws. The investigation of the Vice President grew out of a widespread probe into alleged kickbacks to political figures in Maryland that is being conducted by Beall's staff of prosecutors in Baltimore.

News of Beall's letter to Agnew informing him that

he was the subject of a federal investigation was reported by The Washington Post and other newspapers on Aug. 7. Subsequent news stories have quoted unnamed sources saying the probe involves allegations that several Maryland engineering firm officials made regular cash payments to Agnew to receive choice state contracts while Agnew was governor of Maryland.

At his own press conference Tuesday, Agnew specifically denounced a report in this week's issue of Time magazine that said that "in the view of Justice Department officials in Washington, the case against him (Agnew) is growing steadily stronger and that an indictment appears inevitable."

In San Clemente yesterday, the President said that his confidence in the integrity of the man he chose to be his vice presidential running mate in both 1968 and 1972 has not been shaken by the allegations concerning Agnew.

"In fact," Mr. Nixon said, "it has been strengthened by

his courageous conduct and his ability, even though he's controversial at times, as I am . . . I have confidence in the integrity of the Vice President and particularly in the performance of the duties he has had as Vice President and as a candidate for Vice President."

Mr. Nixon, however, appeared to draw a careful distinction between Agnew's performance as Vice President and his earlier activities, which are the subject of the bulk of the federal investigation.

"Now, obviously," the President said, "the question arises as to charges that have been made about activities before he became Vice President. He would consider it improper, I would con-

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sider it improper, for me to comment on those charges and I shall not do so."

The President also refused to comment when asked whether he would expect Agnew to resign or at least leave office temporarily should he be indicted. Reminded that he said earlier any government official indicted in connection with the Watergate case would be suspended, and any official who was convicted would be fired, Mr. Nixon said:

"The Vice President has not been indicted. Charges have been thrown out by innuendo and otherwise which he has denied to me personally and which he has denied publicly. And the talk about indictment and

the talk about resignation even now . . . would be totally inappropriate."

Agnew's press secretary, J. Marsh Thomson, said yesterday that to the best of his knowledge Agnew and Mr. Nixon had not discussed their identical demands that Richardson investigate the news leaks.

Agnew, who asked Richardson to conduct an investigation in a statement read to reporters on Tuesday, yesterday released the text of a letter sent to the Attorney General in which he reiterated his demand and asked that those guilty of leaking information to the press be exposed and disciplined.

" . . . There can be no

question that some personnel of your department have regularly released information to the press—when their duty was to maintain silence," Agnew wrote.

"There can be no doubt that you now have the obligation to investigate these leaks and to use all the tools at your disposal to expose and discipline those responsible. Only drastic and immediate action will curb this vicious and illegal practice."

In asking for the investigation, Thomson explained, the Vice President was not suggesting that Justice Department investigators should quiz reporters about their sources. He said that Agnew was not being criti-

cal of the press for publishing stories about the investigation, but was rather limiting his criticism to Justice Department employees both here and in Baltimore who allegedly have supplied information to reporters.

A Justice Department spokesman said yesterday there are no plans to subpoena newsmen in connection with the investigation into news leaks.

The department's regulations allow the subpoena of reporters in connection with the investigation of possible crimes, the spokesman said. The leak of information to newsmen is not a crime but a violation of another Justice Department regulation, the spokesman said.