

Taking 'Case to the Country'

Agnew to Keep Speaking Out

10/3/73
By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew was described yesterday as convinced that he must "take his case to the country" in the hope of winning it eventually in Congress.

Two supporters of the Vice President, one an Agnew aide and the other a Republican Party official, said that Agnew has come to the conclusion that he ultimately will face some sort of congressional proceeding arising from the accusation compiled by government prosecutors. These supporters said that Agnew believes he can convince a majority of the American people that he is innocent and, further, that Congress will be receptive to public opinion.

Another person in the Agnew camp said the Vice President is so convinced

that he will be exonerated that he is already looking ahead to the 1974 congressional campaign. In his meeting with California Republican officials in Los Angeles last Saturday—where Agnew said it would "not be realistic" for him to consider himself a presidential possibility in 1976—the Vice President also discussed party prospects in next year's elections.

That closed door meeting came immediately after Agnew's emotional speech to the convention of the National Federation of Women. The Vice President was drowned out by applause when he declared that he had been accused on perjured testimony and would not resign if indicted.

See AGNEW, A11, Col. 1

Agnew lawyers asks reporters for sources. Page A8.

AGNEW, From A1

Agnew will follow up that speech Thursday, when he is to address the United Republican Fund in Chicago at a \$125-a-plate dinner.

"The timing of this is extremely propitious," said dinner Chairman Edmund B. Thornton. "I doubt there will be any empty seats."

J. Marsh Thomson, the Vice President's press secretary, said he expects Agnew to give the kind of speech he gave last Saturday.

"This kind of audience should lead us to anticipate a sequel," Thomson said. "The Vice President's in a fighting mood. I doubt this is the occasion for a bland pep talk."

Nor will his speech this week be Agnew's only outspoken defense.

The Vice President is to speak next Tuesday in New York before an audience of builders and to the Friars Club in Los Angeles on Oct. 13. He is to make a political speech in Pittsburgh on Oct. 29 and another speech there the following day to the Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce.

Several other prospective speeches are also under consideration.

Thomson said the Vice President is likely to hold another news conference "at the appropriate time" and

that he will meet with Republican officials, when requested to do so, in the states he visits.

One Agnew associate said that the Vice President is aware that he will have to speak out in his own defense. He contrasted this to the policy of "calculated restraint" pursued by President Nixon, who made no answer to Watergate accusations from the time of a May 15 statement released through aides until an Aug. 22 press conference in San Clemente.

This Agnew supporter said the Vice President's strategy is based upon the expectation that Congress ultimately will have to make some decision about whether to consider the charges against him.

Last week Agnew asked House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) to launch an investigation by the House into the accusations. Albert declined on grounds that the case was before the courts.

The Vice President, who has not been charged with any crime, is under investigation for possible violations of bribery, conspiracy, extortion and tax fraud statutes arising from a Maryland kickback investigation. His lawyers have filed an action that seeks to block Agnew's indictment on grounds that he cannot be

tried while he is Vice President.

There are at least three ways that Congress could again face a decision on Agnew's case.

One is that the courts would uphold Agnew's legal argument and the Vice President then would ask Albert to reconsider his decision. A

second is that an impeachment resolution would be filed while the legal case is being argued and the House then would proceed to impeach him. A third possibility would be that Agnew would be indicted and convicted and that he would then be impeached.

Agnew left no doubt last Saturday that he would prefer to have his case decided by Congress rather than by the courts.

In a speech that was interrupted 32 times by applause, the Vice President proclaimed his innocence and said he could not get a fair trial before a Maryland jury because of perjured testimony and news leaks by top Justice Department officials.

"The well has been most successfully poisoned," Agnew said, "and I felt the only chance that I had to get a fair hearing of the facts was to appeal to the House of Representatives."

But there are signs that Agnew's preference for a congressional decision, even if this means impeachment, is not shared by the White House.

After Agnew on Saturday targeted Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen as a source of the "malicious and outrageous" news leaks against him, Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson issued a statement defending Petersen. Then, on Monday, the White House gave Richardson another chance to make his defense when the White House counsel's office telephoned the Attorney General and was assured that Petersen "had not talked to the news media."

This information was released by White House spokesman Gerald L. Warren, who also confirmed that White House special counsel J. Fred Buzhardt was indirectly involved in negotiations between Agnew's lawyers and the Department of

Justice. These negotiations, which have been described as plea bargaining, were unsuccessful.

The disclosures by Warren reaffirmed the belief of some Agnew aides that the President is still determined to force the Vice President's resignation. This has been denied by Mr. Nixon, and Agnew has issued instructions to his staff not to discuss the issue.

Nevertheless, there are indications that relations between the President and Vice President on the staff level have been severely strained.

And, although it didn't receive much attention in the Saturday speech, Agnew's own explanation of Watergate differed from President Nixon's. The President has sought to portray the events of Watergate as similar to "wrongs" that have been committed in other campaigns by Democrats. Agnew said it would be "a mistake" to believe that what occurred in Watergate "is typical of political campaigns."