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Secret Service: To California With Agnew

By Maxine Cheshire

part 2/13/74

Escorted by a Secret Service detail that has already been called illegal, former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew has flown to California for an eight-day vacation that could cost taxpayers as much as \$12,000.

Agnew left yesterday, reportedly to attend Jack Benny's 80th birthday celebration and spend some time in Palm Springs with entertainer Frank Sinatra.

Benny's birthday is Thursday, but the party, according to a Palm Springs society reporter, will not take place until this weekend. Sinatra is the host.

A Secret Service spokesman, Jack Warner, refused yesterday to say how many agents accompanied Agnew. To do so, he maintained, would be a violation of standard "security procedures."

Warner offered to "provide factual information" on the trip to Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.) if he would keep it "in confidence" and not divulge it to the press. Moss declined. He has been pressing the White House to take away the privileges and protection provided to Agnew since his resignation, on grounds that there is no lawful authority for maintaining it.

At prodding from Moss, Comptroller Gen. Elmer B. Staats declared earlier this month that it is "beyond question" that President Nixon had no authority to provide Secret Service protection for Agnew after he resigned as Vice President.

Moss charged yesterday that the trip to California is "another act of executive arrogance at the expense of the taxpayer for the benefit of a man who discredited both the vice presidency and his profession."

He said that he did not care if the number of agents who made the trip with Agnew was one or 21. "The law is violated," he said. "The agent's transportation and per diem is a federal charge."

According to General Accounting Office figures supplied to Moss, Agnew's detail of agents usually numbers 21. But it is doubtful that all of them accompanied him to the West Coast.

Ordinarily, agents from the Los Angeles office or elsewhere in California would be brought to the scene as reinforcements.

Secret Service policy requires that enough agents be on hand to maintain three eight-hour shifts around the clock.

For agents who flew from Washington the plane

fare in coach comes to \$334 round-trip. Their per diem allowance will be \$25 per day. There are also such expenses as the furnishing of a limousine and a back-up car.

A spokesman for Moss's office said last night that Staats may be asked to block payment of all bills connected with the trip.

It isn't clear whether Agnew intends to work on his new book while he is in California. But he took along a packet of material from his literary agent, Scott Meredith.

Meredith said yesterday that he has given Agnew written offers from five publishing companies that want to make a deal for the uncompleted manuscript of his suspense novel, "The Canfield Decision." "He is going to study them carefully and make up his mind—maybe today—which one he wants to accept," Meredith said.

Meanwhile, the Ladies Home Journal sent an editor and photographer down from New York to Agnew's house in Kenwood over the weekend to interview him about his writing habits and takes pictures of him at work.

They plan to publish this spread in the May issue, along with selected "appetizers" from the small amount of material that is actually written at this stage.

The Journal has told Agnew that it will give him a gala publication party and has pledged to promote the article with a great deal of fanfare on television.