

Md. GOP Chairman Lankler to Resign

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ALEXANDER M. LANKLER
... divisiveness symbol

By Richard M. Cohen
and Philip A. McCombs
Washington Post Staff Writers

ANNAPOLIS, July 13 — Maryland State Republican Chairman Alexander M. Lankler announced today that he will resign his party post in September, saying he had become "a symbol" of "continuing divisiveness" within the state GOP.

In a statement, the 45-year-old Washington lawyer said he would call a meeting of the Republican State Central Committee on or before Sept. 22 for the purpose of electing a successor.

Lankler's announcement comes less than a month after the central committee turned back an attempt by conserva-

tives and their allies to oust him for the role he played in a scheme to exaggerate the money raised by a 1972 testimonial gala for Vice President Spiro T. Agnew.

Lankler's announcement is the latest in a series of events stemming from the disclosure that the gala's gate was inflated for public relations purposes. Already, Baltimore banker Blagden H. Wharton, the treasurer for the Agnew fund raiser, has been indicted by a Maryland grand jury on four counts of violating the state's election laws.

In addition, the General Accounting Office—the investigative arm of Congress—reported last month that it has uncovered eight "apparent" vi-

olations of federal elections laws. Its report was turned over to special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox for possible prosecution.

In his statement, Lankler did not mention his admitted role in planning the Agnew gala, nor the lingering, although diminishing, possibility that he might be indicted by the Anne Arundel County grand jury that indicted Wharton. He referred instead to the attempt to purge him last month and thanked his supporters for their vote of confidence.

In choosing to call a special

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meeting for the selection of a successor, Lankler was apparently trying to insure that the new chairman would come from the party's moderate wing. If he simply resigned outright and declared the chair vacant, the new chairman would be the present vice chairman, Robert Marks, a Howard County conservative.

Lankler, however, denied that his call for a special election was designed to keep the chairmanship in moderate hands. He simply wanted a "free and open election," adding that the choice of a successor was "up to the State Central Committee."

Up to now, the party's liberal to moderate wing has been able to control the central committee and it is likely it will be able to continue to do so. Lankler's resignation reportedly was cleared with the party's leadership which includes U.S. Sens. Charles McC. Mathias and J. Glenn Beall, both of whom tacitly supported Lankler against conservative attempts to oust him.

Lankler refused to say if he had a successor in mind.

One likely candidate is State Sen. Edward Thomas (R-Western Maryland), the former chairman of the Maryland Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Thomas was one of Lankler's floor leaders at the June 18 meeting of the State Central Committee and has been viewed by many as his heir apparent.

Another possible candidate is Rep. Lawrence Hogan (R-Md.), who said last week in an interview that he would be interested in the post if Lankler stepped down.

Lankler is a prominent Washington attorney from

Montgomery County who has been chairman of the Republican Party in Maryland since 1970. He replaced Donald Kendall who resigned to run unsuccessfully for Montgomery County executive.

The General Accounting Office report said that an investigation uncovered eight "apparent violations" of federal election and perjury laws in connection with the Agnew dinner and the re-election funds used to inflate its proceeds.

The GAO report did not single out Lankler specifically, but it left open the possibility that the apparent violations could result in jail terms or fines for about 20 of Maryland's most prominent Republicans, including Lankler and Baltimore banker Blagden H. Wharton, treasurer of the Agnew dinner.

A spokesman for Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox said the GAO report would be referred to Cox for review to see if any individuals or committees should be prosecuted.

Lankler has publicly conceded that the "Salute to Ted Agnew Committee" hid the source of the re-election money by reporting it as tickets purchased by people who had in fact not bought them.

He said the scheme was agreed to by top state Republicans when it appeared that ticket sales to the Agnew dinner in May, 1972, were lagging. The money was subsequently passed through a Nixon fund-raising committee in Maryland and then returned to the national Finance Committee to Re-elect the President.

An original report to the GAO by the Agnew committee, as required by law, listed 33 donors to the committee, 31 of whom were dropped from

the report in an amended version.

Lankler publicly disclosed the details of the transaction after Hugh Sloan, the former treasurer of the Nixon finance committee, named Lankler as the person to whom he turned over \$50,000.

Sloan, in testimony before the special Senate Watergate committee, said he understood the money was for "start-up" expenses in producing the Agnew fund raiser.

Lankler later explained that when fund raising for the affair was not going well he contacted Maurice Stans, then chairman of the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President, and asked for the \$50,000.

After receiving the money from Sloan in \$100 bills, Lankler said, he gave it to Lynn Meyerhoff, the chairman of the Agnew committee. Mrs. Meyerhoff deposited the money in an account at the Maryland National Bank, Lankler said.

Lankler said the money was then attributed to ticket sales "for public relations reasons." He said it was later repaid through the Maryland Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Wharton, a vice president of

Maryland National Bank, has been indicated by a state grand jury on charges of violating the Maryland election laws. He has pleaded innocent.

A GAO spokesman said everyone involved in the alleged scheme, including Lankler and persons who simply allowed their names to be used, could be prosecuted. Only Wharton has been indicated thus far.

The GAO report listed these apparent violations of federal law:

- A false report by the Salute to Agnew committee for "falsely reporting contributions" and for "failing to keep a detailed and exact account of contributions received..."

- Participation "by persons acting for the Agnew committee who knowingly and willfully participated in the effort to falsify, conceal or cover up the committee's receipt of \$50,000."

- False statements by Wharton when he signed his name to his original report and again when he told the GAO the report was true.

- Failure of the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President to report the \$50,000 transfer to the Agnew Salute to Agnew.