

Beall Calls Leaks 'Timebomb'

BALTIMORE (AP) — The news media was "dangerously myopic" in its pursuit of information from the grand jury probe of Spiro T. Agnew, U.S. Atty. George Beall charged Friday.

Beall told the opening luncheon at the 65th convention of the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association that news stories based on leaks had built up an "explosive timebomb" that was kept from going off by

Agnew's resignation and no-contest plea to a tax charge.

"There is an obvious difference between exposing corruption and probing into the secret deliberative workings of the grand jury system," Beall said.

"When it claims it is the persons who leak the information who should be penalized, the

press is ducking the issue. When it cites investigative reporting in a case such as that of the former vice president, it is being dangerously myopic."

Beall headed the federal grand jury which looked into Agnew's terms as Baltimore County executive, governor of Maryland and vice president.

The on-going investigation has focused on an alleged system of kickbacks to Maryland politicians from architects and engineers doing nonbid government business.

In the two months between Agnew's announcement that he was under investigation by Beall's office and his resignation, a series of news stories appeared quoting unnamed sources and giving information which supposedly come from the grand jury's scrutiny.

Federal Judge Walter E. Hoffman approved a defense request for subpoenas of nine newsmen to reveal their sources. Agnew, however, resigned before the cases could be heard and possible contempt proceedings begun.

"Mr. Agnew's resignation spared the press and the courts from detonating an explosive timebomb," Beall said.

While a possible constitutional clash was avoided, the prosecutor noted, the conflicts between the rights of a free press and a fair trial were not resolved.

Beall suggested that the news media conduct a self-investigation of its relationship with the courts "with no less contempt for itself than that with which it view other institutions."