

Agnew Says Watergate Could Hurt GOP in '74

Washington

If the Watergate affair is "still dangling," Vice President Spiro Agnew said yesterday, it will hurt the GOP in next year's midterm elections.

"If we get through it and finish it in the public consciousness," Agnew went on, "then I don't see how we're going to be hurt by it."

Indirectly, the vice president added his voice to those urging President Nixon to take drastic action. The Watergate affair must be "totally resolved," Agnew said, "regardless of what has to happen."

OBJECT

In a copyrighted interview in U.S. News and World Report published today, the vice president also objected strongly to the role of the Senate select committee headed by Senator Sam Ervin (Dem-N.C.), investigating Watergate.

"I just don't think that the Senate, at this point, ought to be in the Watergate investigation," he said. "After the federal grand jury's finished, if they (the senators) are not satisfied, I think they have a perfect right to proceed."

Noting that strict courtroom rules of evidence do not apply to televised Senate committee hearings, Agnew went on to say "there just aren't any safeguards (for the witnesses). A senator has a right to make political speeches in the course of the questioning, as we saw so often done during the McCarthy hearings" of the 1950s.

RESPONSE

However, Senator Lowell Weicker (Rep-Conn.) a member of the Senate Watergate committee, said

yesterday there are "no boundaries" to the committee's work. Appearing on ABC's "Issues and Answers," Weicker said he had no "proof" that the President of the Justice Department is now conducting a "hardnosed" investigation.

Weicker said his theory is this:

"The President was very deeply involved (last summer) in getting us out of Vietnam, deeply involved in our foreign policy, and I think turned to his men and said 'Okay, set up our campaign. You tell us where (I'm) supposed to be for campaign appearances, and you take care of the (1972 election) campaign. I'm going to work as the President of United States'."

CONFIDENCE

The President, Weicker went on, placed "far too much confidence" in top White House aides, "and they abused it."

Appearing with Weicker, Senator Charles Percy (Rep-Ill.) suggested that the Watergate investigation "should be taken out of the Justice Department" because its top officials' close links to administration figures, past and present, now being investigated.

Percy said he intends to urge the Senate to pass a resolution urging the President to appoint a special outside prosecutor of "impeccable quality" such as Harvard's president Derek Bok, former dean of the Harvard Law School.

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