

NYTimes
AUG 8 1973
**Agnew, Nearly Alone, Ponders Effect
Of an Inquiry on His Political Future**

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 — Vice President Agnew contemplated his legal situation and the effect of a criminal investigation on his political career in the privacy of his office next door to the White House today.

Friends were urging him to take his case immediately before "the court of public opinion," to make a "frontal assault" on the investigators and to argue his innocence in the sharpest possible contrast to the remote scorn that President Nixon displayed when the first Watergate charges were made.

One of Mr. Agnew's closest advisers saw the danger of major political damage to the man, who has consistently been the favorite, in polls of Republican voters, for his party's Presidential nomination in 1976. The adviser, who insisted that he not be named, saw a disposition in the White House to let Mr. Agnew "twist slowly, slowly in the wind," rather than help him.

Inquiry to Continue

But the Vice President took no public steps to help him today as Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson confirmed that the investigation of "state and local contracts" in Maryland would continue. "We're waiting to see what the Vice President does," said a member of his own circle, puzzled but expectant.

He added, "If you let matters stand, it's very damaging."

Marsh Thompson, Mr. Agnew's press secretary, said the Vice President spent a full day in his second-floor suite in the Executive Office Building but had seen no one outside his personal staff.

Mr. Agnew declined repeated requests by the television networks to read before cameras the written statement he issued last night. And, true to that statement, he offered no elaboration today on such questions as when he first heard that he was being investigated, or what he had told President Nixon about the case.

Agnew's Statement

Mr. Agnew's statement yesterday, issued at 11 P.M., shortly before newspapers were to report on their own the investigation of kickbacks by county, state and Federal contractors in Maryland, was as follows:

"I have been informed that I am under investigation for possible violations of the criminal statutes. I will make no further comment until the investigation has been completed, other than to say I am innocent of any wrongdoing, that I have confidence in the criminal justice system of the United States and that I am equally confident of my innocence will be affirmed."

Gerald Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, said at the morning news briefing that there would be no Presidential comment on the Agnew investigation today. Pressed to say whether President Nixon retained

confidence in Mr. Agnew, Mr. Warren repeatedly declined to answer.

He also rejected a reporter's interpretation that he was "washing his hands" of the Vice President's difficulties.

Yet, the White House's insistence on no comment was notably less support than Mr. Nixon had given aides who left his staff in the Watergate scandal—or than Mr. Agnew had voiced for the President during the Watergate affair.

Less Support

And the absence of any reassurance clearly rankled the Vice President's aides. The remark about twisting "slowly, slowly in the wind" was first used last spring by John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's chief adviser on domestic affairs, to describe the tacit abandonment of L. Patrick Gray 3d when the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was under heavy attack during his Senate confirmation hearings.

The same phrase was being quoted angrily in the Vice President's offices today to describe Mr. Agnew's lonely predicament. The White House staff, said an Agnew loyalist, is happy about "anything that keeps the people's minds off Watergate."

Political Motives

Political motives were also being ascribed to George Beall, the United States Attorney in Baltimore who is conducting the investigation, and to Attorney General Richardson, who met for an hour with Mr. Beall this morning.

"I never saw a prosecutor who didn't want to be Attorney General," said Mr. Agnew's friend, "and I never saw an Attorney General who didn't want to be something else."

Yet, the same Agnew confidant conceded that he knew nothing of the facts in the case, which apparently stems from Mr. Agnew's years as administrator of Baltimore County and later as Governor of Maryland.

George Bush, chairman of the Republican National Committee, did not respond today to requests for comment on the investigation of Mr. Agnew.

Mr. Agnew's isolation today after the sudden jolt of last night's news pointed up again the fragile base of the man who won the Vice-Presidency and a fervent popular following after only six years in public life—four of them in the obscure county office where Federal detectives started investigating corruption early this year.

'The White Knight'

As Vice President, Mr. Agnew had been so clearly excluded from White House operations that he stood free of suspicion in the Watergate burglary and cover-up, free to champion law and order and to claim the title of "Mr. Clean" if he ran for the Presidential nomination. One independent biography was titled, "The White

Knight," an image he has enjoyed.

Yet, he is not a complete stranger to charges of impropriety.

During the 1968 campaign, a small army of reporters looked for evidence of scandal in Mr. Agnew's meteoric career, but they reported inconclusive findings.

It was reported, for example, that Mr. Agnew and some of his friends who are now being investigated had invested together, while Mr. Agnew was a candidate for the Governor's office, in a 106-acre parcel of land on the probable approach route of the state-built Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Mr. Agnew defended the investment as "above-reproach," but proceeded to sell his interest for the \$34,200 he had paid.

Bank Controversy

It was also reported that Mr. Agnew was a founding director of the Chesapeake National Bank in Towson, Md., the county seat, and that the bank listed Mr. Agnew first among its directors and held state funds while Mr. Agnew was Governor. Mr. Agnew confirmed that he owned 400 shares of the bank's stock, then worth about \$11,000, but admitted no impropriety.

When The New York Times said in an editorial in 1968 that Mr. Agnew was guilty of "obtuse behavior as a public official" and was "not fit" for the Vice-Presidency, Mr. Agnew heatedly denied any conflict of interest. At that time, Mr. Nixon backed his running mate completely, charging The Times with "the lowest kind of gutter politics."

The Senate Watergate hearings led to the disclosure that the Committee for the Re-election of the President had bought \$50,000 worth of tickets—without reporting the expenditure—for a Salute-to-Agnew dinner in Baltimore during last year's campaign. Mr. Agnew insisted that he had not known that the committee was padding the receipts at his dinner.

Political Financing

In an interview published today but conducted before the public knew that Mr. Agnew was under investigation, the Vice President said that public financing of political campaigns might be the only answer to popular cynicism about private contributors.

If he did decide to run for President, he told William Theis of the Hearst newspapers, "I'd like to see us get into public financing." He added, "I'm coming to the conclusion it's the only answer."

"If you're going to raise any substantial amounts of money, you have to go to people of means," Mr. Agnew continued. "People of means are usually people who have extensive business connections. And with the complexity of government relations with business in all the regulated fields, it's virtually impossible to avoid the drawing of some links, however tenuous they might be

between an individual contributor and some suit that he may have with a government regulatory agency." He concluded:

"So I think the only answer, in order to dispel this public lack of confidence, is public financing. I think we have to come to it. That won't cure all the abuses, but I think it will help."