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6 Agnew Aides Ruled Legal

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The General Accounting Office has ruled it is "legally proper" that taxpayers' money—estimated by one source at \$7,222 a month—is being spent to provide staff assistance to former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew in a government office across the street from the White House.

At the same time, however,

Congress' watchdog agency has expressed reservations about Congress' intent that a former Vice President be so supported and has called for clarifying legislation.

In a letter to Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.) released yesterday, Elmer B. Staats, comptroller general of the United States, cited a White House explanation that six aides were helping Agnew in

"completion of his governmental affairs."

Specifically, Staats said, referring to a report to him from J. Fred Bushardt, special consultant to the President, two staff assistants, three secretaries and a receptionist are occupied "sorting the numerous public and private papers which have accumulated since his (Agnew's) taking office in 1969."

The White House, asked yes-

terday to say how much was being spent on salaries for those working for Agnew, failed to do so. However, a report by a Congressional Quarterly used the \$7,222-a-month figure. Two staff assistants are receiving \$21,366 and \$18,583, three secretaries—\$13,791, \$12,573 and \$11,765, and the receptionist \$8,591, CQ said.

Staats reported that Bushardt had advised him "it is expected" that the salaries and use of government offices—one for Agnew to work in and one to store his vice presidential papers—will not be continued "beyond the first part of April."

The money to support Agnew's work comes out of appropriations for "special assistance to the President" at the direction of President Nixon, Bushardt reported, contending that "the use of this fund has always been at the President's discretion."

Staats told Moss, however, that he disagreed, and that the purpose of the appropriation was to support a Vice President in office, because he had no staff of his own other than as President of the Senate.

Nevertheless, Staats said, "we are unable to conclude that such funds are not legally available" to help a resigned Vice President "perform a task which the President deems to be of assistance to him and for which the appropriation would have been available while the former Vice President held office."

Earlier, Moss had also complained about Secret Service protection for Agnew. Staats confirmed that after a GAO finding that payment for such protection was not legal, "we now understand" it was discontinued as of Feb. 17.

Moss said yesterday he was "disappointed" in Staats' finding and would write to him asking for a more diligent search for grounds to bar the payments.

"In a separate action yesterday, Washington lawyers Joel Joseph and John Banzhaf, a professor at George Washington University, asked Attorney General William B. Saxbe to sue Agnew to recover money he "unlawfully received" while he was Vice President, as charged by the Justice Department in the tax evasion case that led to Agnew's resignation.