

# Agnew Role Unsure But He Stays Loyal

By Lou Cannon

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Spiro Agnew declared firmly yesterday that he is still the President's man but said he has often been frustrated by the vice presidency and is uncertain of his role in the second Nixon Administration.

"Quite candidly, the President hasn't defined my role yet," Agnew said. "I don't know exactly what I'll be doing and its up to the President to define it."

In a wide-ranging interview the Vice President also speculated that the Watergate bugging case "could be harmful" to him if he becomes a presidential candidate despite his own lack of personal involvement. Agnew said that the issue would be a liability for Re-

publican candidates in 1974 and 1976 if the political espionage questions are not "quickly resolved in the public mind" by the present legal proceedings.

Agnew also reaffirmed his belief that Mr. Nixon was not personally involved in the Watergate case, and he criticized the Senate Select Committee headed by Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) for proceeding with hearings before the grand jury "has completed the indictment process."

Two themes dominated the Vice President's responses to a variety of questions—his personal loyalty to the President whether he's

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"riding high or under attack" and his uncertainty about what his role would be during the remainder of Mr. Nixon's term.

On May 2, two days after the resignation of the President's top aides because of the widening Watergate scandal, the White House announced that Agnew would be given new duties, including vice chairmanship of the Domestic Council.

But the President has never spelled out what the new duties will entail, and Agnew last week passed up an invitation to address the Republican governors meeting in New York.

Agnew said he did so because he didn't want to appear to be undercutting Kenneth R. Cole Jr., the executive director of the Domestic Council. Agnew said that his appearance at the meeting might have made it appear that he was "assuming his old role" of administration spokesman to the governors.

In an interview last week Cole said that the Domestic Council staff would remain under his jurisdiction but that Agnew would be consulted more than he has been in the first months of the second term.

Apart from his specific lack of knowledge about what his new assignments may be, Agnew conceded that he on many occasions has felt frustrated in the vice presidency because of the relative powerlessness of the office.

The Vice President recalled that he had previously served in government positions with executive authority, first as executive for Baltimore County and then as governor of Maryland.

"It's an intellectual frustration for a man who's spent his time in executive government making decisions to suddenly find that he cannot make decisions anymore; that he can only recommend that they be made," Agnew said. "It's not a debilitating frustration or a frustration that makes me want to abandon the vice presidency... it's simply an adjustment from a line re-



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... undecided on candidacy

responsibility to an advisory responsibility and it's hard to make, it really is."

"In the first year that I was Vice President I would find myself saying, 'well, now we are going to do this,' and then I would come back and say, 'we're not going to do anything, we're going to ask the President if it's not a good idea to do this,'" Agnew recalled. "So the vice presidency has its frustrations and it's a tremendous adjustment for someone who has been a single executive."

Asked if his situation was analogous to Hubert Humphrey's in the final years of the Johnson administration when Humphrey alternately was criticized for being too loyal and for not being loyal enough, the Vice President responded with a broad smile.

"This is a very difficult problem that all vice presidential candidates are faced with, and I don't think there is any good answer," he said.

Agnew said he has reached no decision about his candidacy but would not run for President unless it appeared he could win.

"I can assure you of this that if I go after the nomination it will be because I think I can get it and once having achieved it that I think I can be elected," the Vice President said. "I'm not going to go through any long effort and exercise for

the honor of seeking the nomination. If I go after it it will be because I think I can be elected."

In a copyrighted interview with U.S. News and World Report last month, Agnew was somewhat more positive about his chances. He said then that "if I decide to do it, I'll run to win and I can win."

Discussing other Republicans, Agnew said yesterday that former Treasury Secretary John Connally had "certainly put himself in a position where he can begin to become a formidable prospect."

Agnew also said that California Gov. Ronald Reagan and New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller must be considered "factors" in the Republican competition for President.

Watergate's effect on either the mid-term elections of 1974 or the 1976 presidential elections will depend upon how quickly "all of the information" is made public.

"If it comes out expeditiously, I would think that the possibility of the effect on the election would be rather diminished," Agnew said. "If it's stretched out into a continuing chain of accusation and rumor that has not been determined judicially, and is still hanging fire at the time of the election, it's got to have an adverse effect."

Agnew said he could "envisage a situation where it is still hanging fire as late in 1975, in some aspects."

Agnew said he "can see the possibility in some circumstances in which it (Watergate) could be harmful, and certainly some people indicate there are certain circumstances in which it could be helpful."

How could it be helpful, he was asked.

"The mere fact that I have absolutely no connection with it, according to some observers," Agnew replied. "I don't share that viewpoint. I think that if it has any effect it would be an adverse effect that would have to be overcome."

Agnew proclaimed repeatedly during the interview that he was the "President's man," the phrase he used to

described himself in his acceptance speech at the 1972 Republican convention.

Recently, Agnew told the Harvard Republican Club that he would resign his office if he found himself in disagreement with the President on a matter of conscience. He said yesterday he did not envision such a disagreement.

"I still cannot see myself actively going out and opposing a presidential policy as long as I sit in this office," Agnew said. "I don't think that's what the Vice President is intended to do."

"He would not be Vice President but for the selection of the President and having accepted the job on those terms he should not let his personal ambitions propel him . . .," Agnew said.

The Vice President said that he hoped that as the President's term neared its end he would have "more freedom based on the fact that the President usually does not engage in the proposal of detailed and important programs at that time, which leaves you in a position to become more flexible."

He said he could not conceive of any circumstances that would cause President Nixon to step down because of the Watergate case.

"I'm unable to make such a prediction and I'm not really willing to engage in any speculation because I have no knowledge of any circumstances that would remotely lead to such a consideration," Agnew said.

He said he did not believe that the administration had been rendered unable to govern because of Watergate or that its efforts with Congress had been impaired.

Two Senate Committees on Monday voted to cut off funds for bombing Cambodia. Agnew attributed this not to Watergate but to "frustration" in Congress about the war.

And he again demonstrated his continuing loyalty to the Nixon administration with his next comment: "We're not bombing Cambodia. We're trying to assist the Cambodian government."