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Selection Process

By Jules Witcover
and Spencer Rich

Washington Post Staff Writers

President Nixon yesterday set in motion basically the same procedure for selecting a successor to Vice President Spiro T. Agnew that he used in 1968 when he picked Agnew to run with him—a poll of major party officeholders.

As outlined to congressional leaders in a meeting less than two hours after Agnew's sudden resignation, Mr. Nixon asked that:

- Republican members of the House and Senate submit up to three names each for his personal consideration, to be delivered in sealed envelopes, signed or unsigned, by late today to House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott.

- The nation's 19 Republican governors submit up to three names each to White House chief of staff Alexander Haig Jr.

- Members of the Republican National Committee and GOP state chairmen submit their recommendations to GOP National Chairman George Bush.

According to Scott the President said the choice of a successor was "an entirely open situation" and that "any man or woman able to be President" could be proposed. Also, Scott said, the

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President did not exclude or include anyone because of his availability or lack of it for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976.

This latter clearly was a reference to demands from some Democrats in Congress that Mr. Nixon nominate an individual without presidential ambitions to avoid a partisan clash over his approval by the Democratic-controlled Congress.

The broad invitation was extended only to Republicans as a group. However, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, who with

House Speaker Carl Albert also met with Mr. Nixon after the Agnew announcement, said the President had invited Mansfield's and Albert's personal recommendations as well.

All the sealed letters are to be turned in by 6 p.m., to the President's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, Scott reported.

The President gave no indication, however, that it was his intention to tally all the recommendations—which could exceed 1,000 if all those eligible submit three names—or be bound by the consensus.

Scott, asked whether Mr. Nixon said he would submit a name to Congress within a week, said the President did not say that, but did say he didn't want "any undue delay."

The procedure is reminiscent of that invoked by Mr. Nixon in the early hours after his own nomination as Republican presidential candidate on Aug. 8, 1968. Then, in three separate meetings, he asked his campaign associates selected party leaders and officeholders for their recommendations on a running mate.

Also, in advance of the convention, he made known that he had written to many other party leaders asking for their recommendations. But according to key campaign aides later, this procedure was essentially a public relations gesture to give the recipients a sense of participation.

According to some who attended those 1968 meetings, Agnew's name was not recommended by any participants, but was brought up by Mr. Nixon to get reactions. Some Nixon campaign aides of 1968 also reported afterward that Mr. Nixon had just about decided on Agnew weeks before the convention, and had called the meetings to provide a sense of broad

participation and to confirm his own thinking.

Scott reported that Mr. Nixon yesterday said any acceptable candidate would have to share the President's views on foreign policy. An authoritative White House source known to have discussed the matter with the President echoed the same point, saying that "the principal criterion" in Mr. Nixon's mind was the experience and convictions of the new Vice President in the fields of foreign policy and defense.

This yardstick appeared to reinforce the early speculation that Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller of New York, former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas and former Secretary of State William P. Rogers were high on Mr. Nixon's own list.

All three have been strong supporters of the President's foreign affairs and defense policies, and all have had broad experience abroad, in and out of government. In separate comments, Rockefeller and Connally said they had not been offered the vice presidency, and all three declined to say they would turn down an offer.

"I don't like to respond to an important decision that hasn't been offered," Rockefeller said in a New York press conference. "If the President calls me, I always talk to him."

Rockefeller appeared to be reining in his aspirations temporarily out of deference to Agnew, who in 1968 had been a one-man draft-Rockefeller committee before switching to Mr. Nixon. He called the Agnew resignation "a personal tragedy," and added: "There's an old South American saying that nobody climbs to the top on the dead bodies of their friends."

Connally, reached by telephone at his Houston home after he had attended a cattle sale, said: "I know nothing about it. I had no advance information about it. I have not talked to the President before or since (Agnew's resignation) about it. I don't anticipate I will talk to him about it . . . I have no great ambitions and I'm certainly not going to mount a campaign."