

Buzhardt Linked to Plea Talks

19116113

By Richard M. Cohen
and John Hanrahan

Washington Post Staff Writers

The White House initiated both rounds of plea bargaining that finally resulted in Spiro T. Agnew resigning the vice presidency and pleading no contest to an income tax evasion charge last week, according to an informed source close to the case.

The disclosure buttresses Agnew's contention, made in a weekend interview with The Nashville Banner, that "terrific pressure" from the highest levels of the Nixon administration forced him to resign.

The informed source told The Washington Post that telephone calls from J. Fred Buzhardt, the President's counsel, to Agnew's lawyers and Justice Department officials both initiated the first round of plea bargaining in September and led to a resumption of the aborted talks in early October.

It had been previously disclosed by Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson only that the first call to him in September had been from Buzhardt. It had not been known whether lawyers for Agnew had asked Buzhardt to call Richardson, but the informed source said yesterday that Agnew's lawyers too, were first called by Buzhardt.

Both sides in the negotiations had denied pushing for a resumption of the negotiations in October, which the source also attributed yesterday to phone calls from Buzhardt.

The informed source yesterday would not say why Agnew had changed his mind and agreed to resignation and a plea after his fiery speech in Los Angeles last month in which he said he was innocent and would not resign. The source indicated that Agnew had simply become worn down and realized the inevitability

of the outcome of the investigation directed against him.

Buzhardt was called twice yesterday for comment, but did not return the calls.

Agnew, in a Sunday interview with The Nashville Banner, said it was not his wish to resign. The Banner story, which contains no direct quotes from Agnew, said that

See PROBE, A16, Col. 1

PROBE, From A1

Agnew would not say whether President Nixon himself persuaded him to resign.

Agnew stayed away from the plea bargaining and any implication of a White House role in it in his televised speech last night which included lavish praise of President Nixon.

Richardson, in his press conference last week, did not say how the final bargaining session had come about, but did state:

"The President was kept, of course, fully informed at all times. He fully approved each of the major steps that were taken in the course of these negotiations."

Richardson also said that Mr. Nixon "did not participate in the negotiations as such. He had, of course, as President of the United States, to be satisfied that the essential elements of what were being done were consistent with the public interest."

President Nixon, in his speech nominating House Minority Leader Gerald Ford (R-Mich.) as Agnew's successor, made no mention of Agnew or the negotiations that led up to his resignation.

In his speech last night, Agnew repeated his contention that any cash that came to him while he was governor of Maryland were "part of a long

established pattern of political fundraising in the state."

Both Agnew's predecessor as governor, J. Millard Tawes, and his successor, Gov. Marvin Mandel, disputed Agnew's contention that the money he received was part of a long-established pattern in the state.

Tawes, governor from 1959 to 1967, said in a telephone interview that Agnew "evidently brought this system from Baltimore County into Maryland." Tawes said he was

"amazed" when he read the Justice Department's 40-page document printed in the newspapers as to the kickbacks allegedly received by Agnew.

"I never had a contractor, engineer or anyone else approach me about giving money for a contract," Tawes said. During his two terms, Tawes said, "contractors were given on the basis of merit."

Tawes said that, based on what he read, Agnew had worked out a kickback arrangement with certain con-

tractors when he was county executive of Baltimore County "and they seemed to have followed him to Annapolis."

Mandel, through his press secretary, Frank A. DeFilippo, repeated his press conference statement of last week:

"...there is no such system in the state of Maryland. There is and has not been as far as I know. And I know there hasn't been any since Jan. 7, 1969" (the day Mandel took office).