

NIXON PLEDGES A STRONG TERM;
ASSAILS HIS WATERGATE CRITICS;
DEFENDS AGNEW, DECRIES LEAKS

FAITH IS UNSHAKEN

President Asks Ouster
of Any Aide Involved
in the Disclosures

By BILL KOVACH

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 22— President Nixon said today that his faith in Vice President Agnew was unshaken by a Federal investigation in Maryland involving Mr. Agnew.

Speaking to newsmen on national television at his home in San Clemente, Calif., the President offered his strongest statement of support of Mr. Agnew since it was first learned that the Vice President was under investigation by the United States Attorney's office in Maryland in connection with an alleged scheme of political payoffs by those doing business with the government.

"My confidence in his integrity has not been shaken," President Nixon said. "In fact, it has been strengthened by his courageous conduct and his ability." [Questions 9. Page 28.] The President then said that he had ordered Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson to investigate his agency and immediately dismiss anyone found to be involved in leaking information about the investigation in Maryland to the press.

Question Is Welcomed

Meanwhile, the State's Attorney of Anne Arundel County in Maryland identified today seven members of an Agnew fund-raising committee that was indicted yesterday for conspiracy to conceal a \$49,900 contribution to an Agnew testimonial last year.

President Nixon's order that his Administration investigate itself came only 24 hours after Mr. Agnew had publicly accused members of the Justice Department of an effort to "indict me in the press" and had demanded an investigation.

While both Mr. Agnew and Mr. Nixon restricted their complaints to leaks of information from Federal sources, a good deal of the information made public came from other sources. So widespread has

been the investigation—which began last year—and the number of people involved so large, that a reservoir of information is available to the press outside the Federal system, including lawyers and friends and enemies of those under investigation.

When asked about the Agnew situation today, Mr. Nixon flashed a smile and said that he welcomed the question and

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announced his continued support of Mr. Agnew. He also pointed out that the charges "have been made about activities that occurred before he became Vice President."

Asserting that it would be "improper" to comment on the charges, the President then said:

"I will comment on another subject that I think needs to be commented upon, and that is the outrageous leak of information from either the grand jury, or the prosecutor, or the Department of Justice, or all three.

"I am not going to put the responsibility on all three until I learn from the Attorney Gen-

eral, who at my request is making a full investigation of this at the present time.

"But the leak of information with regard to charges that have been made against the Vice President and leaking them all in the press, convicting an individual, not only trying him but convicting him in the headlines and on television before he's even had a chance to present his case in court is completely contrary to the American tradition."

The President's stand on the matter and his demand that any Federal employe involved in the leaks be dismissed, caught officials in the Justice Department obey surprise. They were not, sources in the department said, surprised that the President supported Mr. Agnew's call for an investigation, but they were by the call for summary dismissal of any one involved.

"An investigation is now under way," a department aide

said, "and we can't contravene the wishes of the President."

Mr. Agnew's office expressed pleasure at the President's statement and insisted that there had been no coordination between the two press appearances.

"It just corroborates what the Vice President has said all along about support he has had from the President," a spokesman said. "It was a ringing statement of Presidential determination."

Sources close to the Vice President also reported today the belief that Mr. Agnew's bold move yesterday in publicly charging a deliberate effort to blacken his name had forced the President to act.

"The danger all along has been for the Vice President to just sit there and let these people wear him down," this source said, "and his move yesterday was right on the money. It forced the whole thing out."

It will damned sure stop now."

Since the public first learned early this month about Mr. Agnew's involvement in a Federal investigation into public corruption in Maryland, a steady stream of information about his alleged involvement has reached the news media. Reports, quoting unnamed Justice Department sources and other sources close to the investigation, have virtually assumed the eventual indictment of Mr. Agnew.

The Vice President called two news conferences, including yesterday's, in an effort to halt the flow of rumors that washed over him. Those around him grew more bitter at the lack of public support from the White House and the continued leaks of information.

President Nixon's endorsement today not only stopped bitter talk among Mr. Agnew's supporters, but also heightened the Justice Department's reaction to the demand for an investigation.

Early today, an inquiry about the progress of the internal investigation brought the response that the Attorney General had "expressed to all department heads his interest in making sure no statements made to the press were made without clearance."

A Parallel Studied

Shortly before the President went on national television, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., his personal assistant, notified the Justice Department of the President's order for an investigation. After his phone call, newsmen were told that the Attorney General was now "diligently pursuing his inquiry into the matter," and sources reported that a formal investigation was being prepared.

Students of Presidential— and Vice-Presidential— news conferences were discussing another parallel between Mr. Agnew's performance yesterday and the President's today. Although both have long histories

of public, and at times bitter, conflict with the news media, both recent appearances were friendly.

Mr. Agnew, for his part, apologized several times for avoiding questions and explained that he blamed not the press for publishing leaks, but those who leaked information.

Mr. Nixon appeared today to be almost self-conscious in his repeated assurances to his questioners that he understood and forgave them the chore of asking "hard" questions.

Typical of the pattern was the exchange when Mr. Nixon was asked if Mr. Agnew should resign if indicted.

"A perfectly natural question," Mr. Nixon said, "and one that any good newsman, as you are, would ask." He then concluded:

"I'm not questioning your right to ask the question, understand, but for me to talk about it would be totally inappropriate." He added, "I make

no comment in answer to that question."

This careful pattern of response was maintained by the President throughout the news conference, although he was faced with some of the most embarrassing questions ever put to him.