

For Agnew, Lunch on Short Notice

By Douglas E. Kneeland

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About 9:30 this morning, Senator Mark O. Hatfield, the liberal Oregon Republican, called Vice President Agnew to ask him to lunch.

It wasn't exactly the kind of day when one would expect the Vice President to be free on a couple hours' notice. Late yesterday he appeared to the House of Representatives to hear him out on accusations against him that have emerged from a Federal investigation on corruption in Maryland. And Mr. Agnew at that hour was still waiting for an answer from the House.

Besides, his attorneys were busy preparing the next step, which many expect to be an attempt in the Federal District Court in Baltimore to raise "constitutional impediments" to the grand jury investigation of evidence against him that is due to be presented tomorrow.

In fact Senator Hatfield was lucky the phone wasn't busy. The Vice President's office in the Executive Office Building is a hectic place these days, deluged with calls, letters and telegrams.

But the Senator did get through — as Senators have a way of doing — and Mr. Agnew, acting like a man with not much on his mind and less on his calendar, said he would be happy to have lunch.

So about the time Speaker Carl Albert was turning down his plea for an inquiry, and Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House Press Secretary, was saying that Mr. Agnew had discussed the possibility of resignation yesterday with President Nixon, the Vice President was sharing roast beef, chicken and ham sandwiches and brownies from Jimmy's with the Wednesday Group, made

up of 14 liberal to moderate Republican Senators, is not exactly the forum most Agnew-watchers would expect the conservative Vice President to turn to during his time of trouble.

Quiet Expectancy

But it was a strange day late September — a day of heavy pause, and quiet expectancy.

"When Senator Hatfield called this morning," said J. Marsh Thomson, Mr. Agnew's press spokesman, "the Vice President told me he said, 'Fine, I can make it.' There's no doubt he welcomed the chance to talk with his fellow Republicans, especially in these times."

Senator Hatfield said Mr. Agnew had seemed "very happy" to be asked.

He said the Vice President had discussed his reasons for asking the House to hear his case and that the 10 Senators present, who considered themselves civil libertarians, had expressed concern to Mr. Agnew "about such things as the leaks from the Justice Department and the Grand Jury."

No Idea of Resigning

Acknowledging that most of those present had some differences with the Vice President over political philosophy, Senator Hatfield added that "We found commonality" on the issue of such leaks.

Speaking for himself, Mr. Hatfield said he had come away from the luncheon with some strong impressions about Mr. Agnew's state of mind.

"I think No. 1, there is no question this man is going to seek his rights," he said. "I think he's determined to have his case aired. I'm thoroughly persuaded he has no idea of resigning."

Senator Hatfield added an-

grily that he thought if the Vice President "is another victim being cast aside by Machiavellian politicians around the White House" he will be more difficult to remove than some other officials have been.

"This man is going to stand his ground and fight them," he declared.

As for the Vice President, he was asked as he left the two-hour luncheon about Mr. Warren's statement today that resignation had been discussed during the Nixon-Agnew meeting. Mr. Agnew responded:

"I have not discussed that possibility. I want to make it very clear that I am not resigning."

At the White House, whatever other business may be going on as usual, the Agnew affair still permeates the atmosphere.

In an extraordinary long news briefing today, Mr. Warren spent almost an hour answering questions about Mr. Agnew, most of which he answered with words such as these:

"The President has taken the position from the outset that the Vice President should decide what course he should take in the matter."

The White House has been sensitive about suggestions that it has been trying to throw Mr. Agnew over the back of the sled, but a Capitol Hill skeptic remarked:

"It's another Pat Gray case — they're letting him twist slowly in the wind."

At the House of Representatives, members chatted about the case in the corridors, on the floor and at lunch.

One observer described the mood as one of "great relief" that Speaker Albert had made the decision and taken the pressure off the members.

"The Republicans are sort of feeling that the Democrats took them off the hook," this observer said. "They didn't want to get involved in a junior Watergate."

Albert 'Pleased'

Speaker Albert himself said in his private office this afternoon that he was "surprised and pleased at the support I got from my side of the aisle."

"It's a case of Agnew trying to invoke medieval law in which a man would run into the church and throw himself on the altar so the king's men couldn't behead him," Representative Bob Eckhardt, a Texas Democrat, said unsympathetically.

Even the House minority leader, Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, seemed scarcely upset as he characterized Mr. Albert's action as "a Democratic decision."

On the Senate side, a Republican who asked not to be named said that he thought Senators in his party "at this point in time are very divided."

"Some feel that anything that could hurt the President should be removed, including the Vice President," he went on. "Another group would rather not get involved. Oddly, many of those who support him as a man are out of the so-called liberal group."

Back at the Vice President's office, the harassed Mr. Thomson, fielding call after call, said:

"I'd just as soon you didn't describe it as frantic. We've got our heads on our shoulders, I think."