

Pressures Behind Agnew's Quitting



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SPIRO AGNEW grimly told aides after his resignation last October that the White House had brought "terrible" pressures on him to give up the vice presidency.

The White House feared he would lose his fight to stay in office, said Agnew, thereby setting a bad precedent for President Nixon's own struggle against impeachment. Agnew felt compelled to resign in exchange for a deal to keep out of jail.

Only a few hours after the high drama in a Baltimore courtroom, we have now learned, he discussed his action individually with trusted aides.

"There are things you don't know about and pressures that were brought on me that you may never know about," he told one aide, who has now recounted the conversation to us.

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TO ANOTHER AIDE, Agnew described the White House as "ruthless" and the pressures it brought on him as "terrible."

What pressures? For one, the White House staff chief, Alexander Haig, had called Agnew's top aide, Art Sohmer, and had warned brutally that the Vice President could end up behind bars if he continued his fighting tactics.

But the Agnew aides were familiar with this incident; they knew the President was maneuvering to ease their man out. What, then, were the terrible, unknown pressures?

One former aide told us he had learned from Agnew's Secret Service bodyguards that the pressures were "personal." Another former aide said he "understood" that Agnew wanted to protect his family from embarrassing revelations.

Washington Post reporters Richard Cohen and Jules Witcover in their carefully researched Agnew book, "A Heartbeat Away," allude cautiously to "spicy insights into Agnew's personal life."

They report that "several witnesses had volunteered very damaging information about aspects of Agnew's personal life." These findings they assert, were "ruled out of bounds" by the prosecutors.

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THE SUPPRESSED statements to the prosecutors, we have learned, dealt with allegations that a Maryland contractor had provided Agnew with a call girl in exchange for government favors.

Agnew told us that the call girl charge was "laughable" and "ridiculous," and played no part in his decision to resign as Vice President. He knew who had told the prosecutors these stories, he said, and the contractor was a "congenital liar . . . a wild man."

Another story linked Agnew with a friend of Blaze Starr, the famed, fiery burlesque queen. She acknowledged to us that Agnew was a "steady customer" at her Baltimore strip joint, the Two O'Clock Club, during his county executive days. But she recalls him as a quiet man who sat in a corner, minding his own business.