

ATTICA



Associated Press

Rockefeller arrives at the Wyoming County Courthouse to testify before grand jury probing 1971 Attica rebellion.

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Attica Grand Jury Hears Rockefeller

By Ray Hill

Special to The Washington Post

BUFFALO, Aug. 29—Vice President Rockefeller said he has "regrets" but sees no political "pluses or minuses"

from his role in the 1971 Attica prison riot.

"The one mistake was not going in from the beginning," he said.

The Vice President said he believed prompt action would have reduced the bloodshed but the retaking of the prison was delayed in the hope of a negotiated settlement.

The former governor testified for more than 2½ hours before a special Wyoming County grand jury investigating the role of state police and, in effect, his own part in the bloody retaking of the prison from rebelling inmates.

Forty-three persons died in the uprising, 39 of them when state troopers stormed the yard.

The Vice President declined to say what the jurors asked and what he told them. He

said he did have some trouble recalling some details "but I gave them the best information I had."

"As you know, testimony before a grand jury must remain confidential," he told reporters.

"I regret the whole incident . . . Lives were lost," he said.

Asked whether there was any wrongdoing by police during and after the retaking of the prison, Rockefeller replied:

"I wasn't there. The circumstances were very difficult, very tense. That kind of a question can only be answered through investigation."

But as to whether it will hurt his chances for the vice presidential nomination, Rockefeller said, "I don't think so. When you're elected, you accept the pluses or minuses as they come."

Rockefeller waived immunity before testifying and, in the only public reference to what took place inside the jury room, said he had praised the jurors for their work.

"I told them how I and the country appreciate the work it's doing," he said.

The Vice President flew into Buffalo aboard a private plane, helicoptered to Warsaw—the Wyoming County seat—and left the same way after testifying.

Security was tight when Rockefeller arrived, accompanied by his attorney, William Jackson, son of the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson

A handful of pickets from

Attica Now—an organization representing the 62 present and former inmates indicted by a grand jury created by the then-governor to probe the rebellion—carried signs urging amnesty for all defendants.

But there were more than 200 others, mostly residents of the area, who applauded and shook hands with Rockefeller outside the courthouse.

Barricades were stretched around the courthouse, a sharpshooter stood in a nearby Methodist church tower, and overhead the crew of a state police helicopter kept watch over the Vice President.

When he left for home this evening, Rockefeller said he did not believe he would be recalled to testify but did not know when the Attica affair would end. "These things never come to a conclusion," he said.

The Vice President testified Thursday in New York City before the Moreland Act Commission about nursing home abuses in the state and, when asked whether his two days on the witness stand had been tiring, he quipped: "You can say that again."

The grand jury that heard the Vice President today was created after Rockefeller had resigned as governor. It was formed after a onetime Attica prober, Assistant State Attorney General Malcolm H. Bell had charged that there was a cover-up by Rockefeller appointees to protect the police. This jury, which is specifically investigating possible police wrongdoing, is expected to make its final report next month.