

Agnew Sets Campaign Tone

WASHINGTON — Vice President Spiro Agnew outlined the Republican case against Sen. George McGovern this week, and in so doing confirmed several suspicions about the shape of the coming presidential campaign.

First, the Nixon strategy will be to take the offensive, painting McGovern as a radical at home and a coward abroad.

SECOND, AGNEW is once again to wield the saber while the President waves the olive branch.

Third, since Agnew has assumed his campaign role before official appointment at the Republican convention the President has apparently made up his mind to keep Agnew for the second go-around.

Fourth, the Nixon-Agnew team may not have fully learned the lesson of overkill. Agnew's speech was the sharpest specific attack to date on McGovern and recognized not only his apparent inevitable presidential nomination but was regarded by White House officials as the opening gun of the 1972 campaign.

It was strong stuff, although there seems little question the President, Agnew, and some Democrats as well as Republicans genuinely believe McGovern to be the danger to the nation that he was portrayed. But to judge from the tone set by Agnew's speech, the administration still has that

same tendency to overstate its views that rebounded in favor of its Democratic targets in the 1970 congressional campaign.

If the Republicans really believe McGovern the patsy opponent they claim, they might make their points against him with more grace and credibility by using a stiletto instead of a scythe.

President Nixon's strategists insist that Nixon himself will confine his campaign activities to five weeks, and will present himself as a peace-maker internationally and a domestic symbol of stability (in contrast to the Democrats, who at the moment at least are in a considerable state of chaos).

So with Agnew's speech the presidential campaign has truly begun, even though neither of the two conventions has yet been held to ratify what seems like a certain course for both parties. And Agnew's speech may have been related to one aspect of the coming campaign that could prove troublesome for the Republicans.

ITS TIMING may have been hastened by a desire to provide a distraction from the current embarrassment created by the Republican snoops who were caught bugging the Democratic National Committee.

The Democrats have always suspected Nixon and company of shady doings, but never quite made it into an issue big enough to threaten him. With the bugging episode they have new ammunition.