

Agnew's Letter To the House

Washington

Here is the text of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's letter to House Speaker Carl Albert:

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I respectfully request that the House of Representatives undertake a full inquiry into the charges which have apparently been made against me in the course of investigation by the United States attorney for the District of Maryland.

This request is made in the dual interests of preserving the constitutional stature of my office and accomplishing my personal vindication.

After the most careful study, my counsel have advised me that the Constitution bars a criminal proceeding of any kind — federal or state, county or town — against a President or Vice President while he holds office.

Accordingly, I cannot acquiesce in any criminal proceeding being lodged against me in Maryland or elsewhere, and I cannot look to any such proceeding for vindication.

In these circumstances, I believe, it is the right and duty of the Vice President to turn to the House. A closely parallel precedent so suggests.

Almost a century and a half ago, Vice President Calhoun was beset with charges of improper participation in the profits of an Army contract made while he had been Secretary of War.

On Dec. 29, 1826, he addressed to your body a communication whose eloquent language I can better quote than rival:

"An imperious sense of duty, and a sacred regard to the honor of the station which I occupy, compel me to approach your body in its high character of grand inquest of the nation.

"Charges have been made against me of the most serious nature, and which, if true ought to degrade me from the high station in which I have been placed by the choice of my fellow citizens, and to consign my name to perpetual infamy.

"In claiming the investigation of the House, I am sensible that, under our free and happy institutions, the conduct of public servants is a fair subject of the closest scrutiny and the freest remarks, and that a firm and faithful discharge of duty affords, ordinarily, ample protection against political attacks: but, when such attacks assume the character of impeachable offenses, and becomes, in some degree, official, by being placed among the public records, an officer thus assailed, however base the instrument used, if conscious of innocence, can look for refuge only to the Hall of the immediate representatives of the people."

Vice President Calhoun concluded his communication with a "challenge" to "the freest investigation of the House, as the only means effectually to repel this premeditated attack." Your body responded at once by establishing a select committee, which subpoenaed witnesses and documents, held exhaustive hearings, and submitted a report on Feb. 13, 1827. The report, exonerating the Vice President of any wrongdoing, was laid on the table together with minority views even more strongly in his favor and the accusations were thereby put to rest.

Like my predecessor Calhoun, I am the subject of public attacks that may "assume the character of impeachable offenses" and thus require urgent investigation by the House as the repository of "the sole power of impeachment" and the "grand inquest of the nation." No investigation in any other form could either substitute for the investigation by the House contemplated by Article 1, Section 11, Clause 5 of the Constitution or lay to rest in a timely and definitive manner the unfounded charges whose currency unavoidably jeopardizes the functions of my office.

The wisdom of the framers of the Constitution in making the House the only proper agency to investigate the conduct of a President or Vice President has been borne out by recent weeks. Since the Maryland investigation became a matter of public knowledge some seven weeks ago, there has been a constant and ever broadening stream of rumors, accusations and speculations aimed at me. I regret to say that the source, in many instances, can have been only the prosecutors themselves.

The result has been so to foul the atmosphere that no grand or petit jury could fairly consider this matter on the merits.

I therefore respectfully call upon the House to discharge its constitutional obligation.

I shall, of course, cooperate fully. As I have said before, I have nothing to hide. I have directed my counsel to deliver forthwith to the Clerk of the House all of my original records of which copies have previously been furnished to the United States attorney. If there is any other way in which I can be of aid, I am wholly at the disposal of the House.

I am confident that, like Vice President Calhoun, I shall be vindicated by the House.

Respectfully yours,
Spiro T. Agnew.