

[Pacifica Washington Bureau]

Vice-President Spiro Agnew made a short announcement this afternoon, denying reports that he was critical of Nixon's handling of the Watergate affair, and defending President Nixon's integrity.

Agnew [voice]: Recently I have noticed a number of reports that unnamed associates or advisers of mine have commented about my reaction to the Watergate matter. Let me emphasize that I do not speak through such unidentified sources. Whenever I have something to say I will say it directly, just as I am doing now.

At the outset I want to make it very clear that I have full confidence in the integrity of President Nixon and in his determination and ability to resolve the Watergate matter to the full satisfaction of the American people.

As to the case itself, beyond the fact that seven men were indicted, tried and convicted of criminal acts, not much reliable information is currently available. We are inundated with rumor, hearsay, grand jury leaks, speculation and statements from undisclosed sources. It's entirely possible that some of this may later prove to be accurate. If it is, it must be confronted forthrightly at that time. But the problem is that presently it is virtually impossible to separate fact from fiction. Jumping to conclusions before the evidence is in can adversely affect the integrity of our criminal investigative process.

I am aware that pressure is being brought to bear on Republican office holders, from the President on down, to comment on this matter. And there is great temptation to comment, if only to make certain that the public understands that one does not condone illegal conduct. However, to speculate for such a self-serving purpose would be unfair to those under investigation who may subsequently be discharged by the grand jury. Equally important, careless comment might easily compromise the prosecution's position by prejudicing the right of a defendant to a fair trial.

For these reasons I will have nothing to say further on the substance of the matter at this time. I may have more to say later.

[Complete.]