

AGNEW CONFIRMS HIS FAITH IN NIXON ABOUT WATERGATE

Says Speculation on Scandal May Prove True but That President Will Resolve It

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SPEAKS TO REPORTERS

Asserts 'We Are Inundated' With Rumor and Hearsay About the Bugging Case
NY Times

By JAMES T. WOOTEN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 25 — Vice President Agnew reiterated his faith in President Nixon today but conceded for the first time that some of the speculation on the Watergate scandal might eventually be substantiated.

"We are inundated with rumor, hearsay, grand jury leaks, speculation and statements from undisclosed sources," he said at a brief, hastily arranged appearance before reporters and television cameras. "It is entirely possible that some of this may be proven later to be accurate. And, if it is, it must be confronted forthrightly at that time."

It was the Vice President's first public utterance on the subject since the 1972 campaign. When he finished, he declined to answer questions and simply left the newsmen with copies of his remarks.

Displeasure Was Rumored

In the last few days, several news reports have suggested that Mr. Agnew was displeased with the way the White House had dealt with the growing scandal and was being advised to dissociate himself from the people now identified with it.

Nevertheless, the Vice President said today that he had "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."

The usually jovial Mr. Agnew was stern and unsmiling as he addressed reporters jammed into his tiny conference room in the old Executive Office Building next door to the White House.

Pressure Conceded

He stepped quickly from an adjoining office to a lectern studded with dozens of microphones, read his 314-word statement in just under 90 seconds, turned and disappeared into the room from which he had entered.

Agnew Confirms His Faith in President

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tain that the public understands that one does not condone illegal conduct."

Yet, he added, such comment would be unfair to the individuals being questioned by a Federal grand jury here and could threaten any defendant's right to a fair trial.

That was a position he took throughout his travels last year as the chief surrogate of the Republican Presidential campaign and as its major messenger of the premise that Senator George McGovern, the Democratic candidate, was a man the American people could not trust.

Earlier Statements Cited

The fact that he did entertain the possibility that some of the "rumor, hearsay, grand jury leaks, speculation and statements from undisclosed sources" might be proven later to be accurate represented a departure from his previous positions on the subject.

Last September, for instance, he told reporters in Minneapolis that the apprehension of five men in the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee was a "set-up" designed to embarrass the Republicans and damage their Presidential campaign.

Later, he called it a "calculated attempt to prove corruption on the part of the Administration" and said it had "fallen flat as a pancake in the eyes of the American people."

In Chicago in October he said he was not bothered by questions of political morality "because I know they do not extend to the White House."

A reporter asked how he knew.

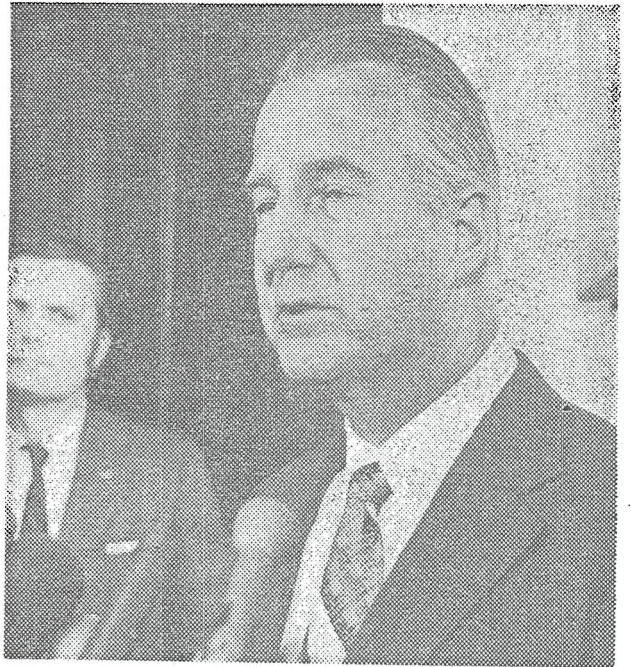
"Because an investigation has been made by the President and he has made the statement that it doesn't," Mr. Agnew responded.

More Say More Later

Moreover, throughout the entire campaign, the Vice President, both in public and private, seemed rather uninterested in the subject of Watergate, telling one reporter on his campaign plane that he did not want to discuss it "because there are so many more important things to talk about."

Today, however, he dealt entirely with the scandal, and concluded by saying that he might have more to say on it later.

As usual, the Vice President



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Vice President Agnew during his brief appearance in the old executive building next to the White House.

was dressed immaculately, and his face was deeply tanned from an Easter holiday in Palm Springs, Calif. But missing from his left lapel was the tiny American flag he had worn in public appearances for years.

Coincidentally, when President Nixon went before the cameras last week to make his statement on recent Watergate developments, the little flag that he too had worn so long was also missing from his lapel.

TEXT OF STATEMENT

Recently I have noticed a number of reports that unnamed "associates" and "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 is entirely possible that some of this may be proven later to be accurate. And 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 all in can adversely affect the integrity of our criminal investigative processes.

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 a 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 be subsequently 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 further to say on the substance of the matter at this time. I may have more to say later.

"Why isn't he answering questions?" a reporter shouted.

"Because he doesn't want to," replied J. Marsh Thompson, Mr. Agnew's press secretary.

His prepared remarks did little to illuminate what the 54-year-old Vice President thinks about the scandal that many believe will have a substantial impact on his own political future.

He did concede, however, that he and other Republican leaders had been under some pressure to comment publicly on the matter. "And there is great temptation to comment," he said, "if only to make cer-

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