

Agnew Blasts Senate Hearing

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Vice President Spiro Agnew condemned the Senate Watergate hearings yesterday for indulging in a "gross perversion of justice" that will ruin the lives of innocent men and let some of the guilty go scot-free.

The nationally televised hearings, Agnew said, can hardly fail to "muddy the waters of justice beyond redemption" by trying the Nixon administration before "the court of public opinion" instead of in established judicial processes.

The Senate investigation, he said, "tends to complicate the search for truth by making both witnesses and committee players on a spotlighted national stage."

In an address to a convention of the National Association of Attorneys General

pealed to the state officials convening here to speak out publicly against the hearings anyway.

A survey of attorneys general showed little immediate interest in a formal endorsement of Agnew's attack on the Watergate hearings, although the vice president's remarks were warmly received by an audience that is normally receptive to the position that criminal allegations should be proved in court before opinions are formed by publicity.

Chauncey H. Browning Jr., West Virginia attorney general and head of the resolutions committee, said the issue may be brought up later in the convention.

NIXON

Conspicuously missing from Agnew's 30-minute address was the expected defense of the Nixon administration that had been forecast late last week by some of the vice president's aides.

The aides had said Agnew was prepared to defend Mr. Nixon vigorously and, by doing so, to reject the advice of some conservative supporters that he disassociate himself from the affair.

Only three times did Agnew refer to Mr. Nixon by name or to the administration, and then only in an oblique way to buttress his contention that the Senate hearings are counter-productive to the Watergate prosecution.

Agnew criticized the hearings for having a "Perry Masonish impact" on the public that he said makes the American people the "ultimate jury" in a case that should be heard before a court.

"The indefatigable camera will paint both heroes and villains in lurid and indelible colors before the public's very eyes in the course of these proceedings," Agnew said. He said the attractiveness and stage presence of witnesses may become more important than the content of their testimony.

SAFEGUARDS

The vice president ticked off seven judicial safeguards that he said are missing from the Senate Watergate probe.

- Cross examination, he said, has been ruled out by Committee Chairman Sam D. Ervin Jr., even though some witnesses stand accused and have the motivation to implicate others to mitigate their own offenses.

- The rights of witnesses to be represented by counsel is abridged because the lawyers can take no active part in the colloquy among the committee members.

- There is no opportunity to rebut testimony, which Agnew said was most noticeable when Gerald Alch, James McCord's former lawyer, had to demand a chance to speak when McCord made several accusations against him.

- There is no guarantee that witnesses can introduce evidence to impeach an accuser's credibility.

- There is no prohibition against hearsay testimony. In fact, Agnew charged, "The witness is not only permitted to give hearsay but is positively encouraged to do so."

- Witnesses are permitted to testify about their inferences, impressions and even speculation. Agnew recalled the May 23 testimony in which former White House aide John Caulfield said that in his mind he believed that former presidential counsel John W. Dean III was referring to Mr. Nixon when he spoke of an offer of executive clemency for the Watergate defendants.

- The Watergate committee has refused to ban cameras from the hearing room, which Agnew said introduces an "emotional and dramatic factor."

"The audible sighs, snickers or groans of the people in the hearing room are dramatically relayed to the millions of TV viewers, thus potentially affecting the way they receive the informa-

tion," Agnew said.

"Thus, even if the Senate hearings succeed in reliably establishing the guilt of some individuals in the Watergate case, they will probably do so at the expense of ultimate conviction of those persons in court.

"And this is bound to leave the American people with an ugly resentment at the spectacle of wrongdoers going scot-free," the vice president said.

Agnew tangentially acknowledged criticism of the government's early Watergate investigation when he said the Senate hearing's popularity may stem from public frustration over "the silence of many key figures" and "the lingering concern that the administration was essentially investigating itself . . ."



AP Wirephoto

SPIRO AGNEW
'Perversion of justice'

here. Agnew predicted that the public hearings will probably go on uninterrupted.

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

ed despite his opposition and the objections raised by special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox.

But the vice president ap-