

# WXPo WXPo Transcript of Vice President

Following is the United Press International transcript of Vice President Agnew's news conference yesterday:

**Mr. Agnew:** Ladies and gentlemen, I have a very short statement to make, following which I'll take your questions.

Because of defamatory statements that are being leaked to the news media by sources that the news reports refer to as close to the federal investigation, I cannot adhere to my original intention to remain silent following my initial statement a few days ago, which asserted my innocence and which indicated I would have nothing further to say until the investigation was completed.

Under normal circumstances, the traditional safeguard of secrecy under such proceedings would protect the subject. But apparently this protection is not to be extended to the Vice President of the United States.

Well, I have no intention to be skewered in this fashion. And since I have no intention to be so skewered, I called this press conference, to label as false and scurrilous and malicious these rumors, these assertions and accusations that are being circulated and to answer your questions regarding them, and any other questions that I might be able to answer concerning the general situation.

**Q.** If you are invited or subpoenaed by the grand jury in Baltimore County, how would you respond?

**A.** As I understand it, Mr. Theis, this grand jury that's in the process of investigating me is a federal grand jury in Baltimore city, not a grand jury in Baltimore County. I have retained counsel to advise me about the request of the grand jury to provide certain information concerning my financial papers and let me emphasize at the outset that I have nothing to hide, that from time to time during my public life I have made available statements of my net worth, my assets and I most recently have done this in May of 1973.

Moreover, in 1966 at the time of the gubernatorial campaign and in 1968 at the time of the first Presidential campaign I was accused of conflicts of interest and was thoroughly investigated and exonerated of those accusations. So I emphasize that I have absolutely nothing to hide in this respect. How and when this information will be made available will depend on the advice of my counsel.

I made all my records available to counsel. I will be advised by them as to the appropriate way in which this information will be made available. I am aware, as you are, that there is intense public discussion concerning certain very important and unprecedented constitutional questions. I would remind you that I've been in public life now for many years and even though I'm a lawyer I don't consider myself sufficient as a constitutional authority to make a judgment in these matters.

## Damned Lies

**Q.** Do you deny outright, published charges that you received a thousand dollars a week in kickbacks?

**A.** I am denying them outright and I am labeling them, and I think a person in my position at a time like this might be permitted this departure from normal language, as damned lies.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, what would you say is the motive of people who are, as you put it, leaking this information?

**A.** Well...

**Q.** The U.S. Attorney is a Republican, appointed in Baltimore. Is it a political motivation?

**A.** First of all, Mr. Lisagor, I have no knowledge of who is leaking this information. As you ladies and gentlemen know, one of the things the press does best is protect its sources. I could not comment in response to the motives of the individuals because I don't know who they are. I would say this, that the accusations that are being made, if they do come from people who are also under investigation must be looked at as accusations that are coming from those who have found themselves in very deep trouble. And are looking to extricate themselves from this trouble and are flirting with the idea that they can obtain immunity or reduced charges, perhaps, by doing so.

Now I have no tangible or definite information about the leaks. I can only respond to your questions about what I know and my position on what's been said.

**Q.** Have you ever had a political slush fund financed by a Baltimore County contractor?

**A.** No.

**Q.** Did you talk to President Nixon about your idea of having this press conference and did he encourage or discourage you?

**A.** Yesterday I had a meeting with President Nixon that lasted about an hour and three quarters in which we discussed this matter and I want to say at the outset that I cannot, because of the normal requirement that I've imposed on myself of relating what takes place in my conversations with the President, get into the subject matter or it. I will say that we had a very, a far reaching discussion. I informed the President of my intention to have this press conference and he made no objection. The idea of having a press conference was my own idea.

## No Kickbacks

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, in the letter presented to you, sir, from the U.S. Attorney's office, were you asked personally to appear before the grand jury and could you define for us also some of the papers that they asked you to present?

**A.** The letter that was handed to one of counsel by one of the prosecutors in Baltimore requested that I provide the usual financial information that is requested in investigations of this type. I believe bank statements, checks, savings account books, deposit slips and the like. Does that answer enough of your questions?

**Q.** But did they ask you to appear personally?

**A.** They did not, they had not requested me to appear personally. They merely asked for this information.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, the charges seem to come from Mr. Wolff, who worked for you in Baltimore and An-

napolis and here. Is he lying, if the charges are reported correctly?

**A.** Well first of all I don't know whether Mr. Wolff has made any charges at this time so I couldn't answer the question on that basis.

**Q.** The thousand dollar a week charges are attributed to him.

**A.** Attributed to him, but we must draw a distinction between rumor and the fact. And in a question exactly legal as the one I face, I would not respond to something I'm not certain of.

**Q.** Did the letter identify you as a target of the grand jury?

**A.** No, it did not.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, would you expect Mr. Nixon to make a personal statement of confidence in you?

**A.** I have no expectation of such a statement. I would not solicit such a statement. I am certain from my conversation with the President in which he did express confidence in me, directly to me. That's all I need.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, have you ever received money for your personal use from any person, contractor doing business with the State of Maryland, or the federal government?

**A.** Absolutely not.

**Q.** What do you think prompted this investigation to begin?

# Agnew's Press Conference



A. I have no idea that I could be accurate on that, because I am not privy to the workings of the prosecutor's office in Baltimore. But from what I understand the investigation began as a result of certain occurrences in Baltimore County very recently.

Q. Mr. Vice President how long have you known, sir, of this investigation involving you?

A. I've been aware of, through rumor, of this investigation since February.

Q. You say your discussion yesterday was far reaching with the President. Did it extend to the possibility you might resign should the charges ever be proved?

A. I'm not going to discuss my conversation with the President. I am sorry.

Q. Is it your belief, sir, that the doctrine of separation of powers applies to your office as well as the Presidency?

A. Again, as I said previously, my belief is of very little weight because I do not consider myself a profound constitutional scholar. We have some of the best constitutional lawyers in the country who have been looking at this question, not from the standpoint of the investigation concerning me, but from a broader standpoint, for a long time and I'd rather defer to their judgment.

Q. Mr. Vice President, did that letter say why they asked for your bank statements?

A. The letter indicated that I was under investigation for possible violations of the criminal statutes.

Q. You have implied that you have heard rumors since February. What do you mean?

#### Cocktail Circuit

A. I mean that friends of mine have indicated to me that there have been rumors in the cocktail circuit that various allegations coming out of the investigation have mentioned my name. Let me continue with that to say that when I became aware of this, recognizing that some of the people who had been mentioned in news reports as being under investigation, were persons who had served with me either in the county or the state, as well as with their existing principals, their immediate principals. I thought it was circum-spect that I establish a contact with the prosecutors office in Baltimore.

I did not think it would be correct for me to make a personal contact under the circumstances. So I employed counsel, who contacted the prosecutor and informed him that he was concerned of the fact that some of these rumors indicated that I was trying to apply some kind of pressure from here in Washington to impede this investigation.

My counsel notified the prosecutor that such was not the case, that I wanted him to thoroughly understand that I would in no way attempt to impede the investigation. And that if any other questions arose he could relate them to me through my counselor.

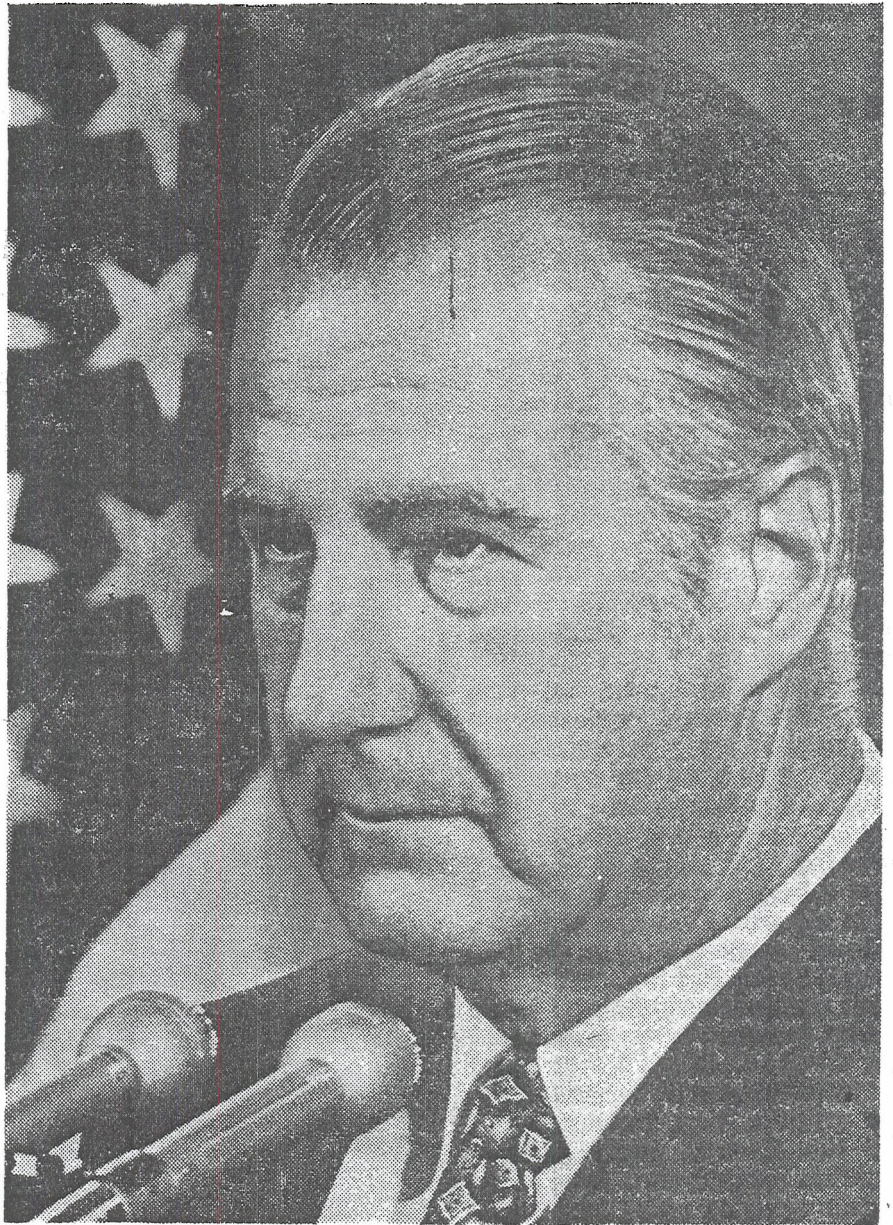
Q. Mr. Vice President, aside from whether you discussed it with the president or not, have you ever considered stepping down temporarily until the matter is cleared up?

A. I have not.

Q. Mr. Vice President, if the investigation should progress and get more serious, even though you would feel yourself innocent, might you consider stepping down to protect public confidence?

A. Let me say right now, I have no expectation of being indicted. And I'm not going to face any kind of contingent thinking in that respect at this time.

Q. Is it your intention from time to time to take questions publicly as you have today as the investigation proceeds?



By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

"What a cloud is, is often in the eyes of the beholder".

A. I don't think it would be, candidly, I don't think it would be advisable for me to respond to every unattributed source statement that might appear in such a volatile matter in the media between now and the time the investigation has been completed. It is not my intention. At least I have no thought of, in my mind, of scheduling another public appearance before the press, but I do not foreclose the possibility based on how the situation develops.

Q. Mr. Vice President, could you clear up one thing for us? You said this matter of your documents, your bank statements, etc., were in your lawyers' hands. Are you saying that if your lawyers decide for constitutional or other reasons this information should not go to the grand jury or the U.S. Attorney, you would agree with your lawyers' decision?

A. I have not decided exactly what I'm going to do. Again, we are in the realm of a contingent appraisal and I think the hardest thing you can do in politics is try to look at all the developing contingencies and answer them before they happen. And its a good way to waste a lot of time.

Q. In your own personal appearance,



if you are invited to appear before the grand jury, would you go?

A. Naturally I'm going to consult with my attorneys. I don't say I'm going to abide blindly by what they recommend. I have to listen to them. I wouldn't have hired them if I didn't have confidence in them. But I'm not going to make these judgments at this time.

Q. Mr. Vice President, did the U.S. Attorney also ask for campaign contribution records from you?

A. He need not ask for those because they are all of record in Annapolis. He has not asked for them.

Q. Do they include gifts from contractors in the state of Maryland?

A. I would suspect that they do because anyone that's been around the political scene in the United States who would expect that campaign contributions don't come from contractors doing state and federal business is quite naive.

Q. Mr. Vice President, would you tell us how and where you first made the President aware of the fact you were under investigation?

A. I am not really certain that I can tell you that. Not that I have any reason to avoid it. But I can't remember. I think I discussed this matter with, when I began to hear these rumors with, with Gen. (Alexander) Haig who brought them to the President's attention. That's the best of my recollection.

Q. Mr. Vice President, would it be fair to say with your contacts, your attorneys' contacts with the U.S. Attorney, that you prompted the letter to you from the U.S. Attorney in Baltimore?

A. That is not an accurate conclusion. No.

Q. Mr. Vice President, when did you first retain counsel in this chronology going back to February?

A. Somewhere around the early part of April.

Q. Mr. Vice President, you said you were concerned about the questions you face, something to the effect "exactly legal as the questions I face."

A. I'm sorry, will you give me that once more?

Q. You said a little earlier something to the effect "exactly legal as the questions I face." Can you define the questions you face?

A. I don't recall the context in which I said that. It doesn't really make much sense to me. You'll have to give me the question a little more accurately before I answer.

Q. My question is can you define the kind of illegal activities that the prosecutor is investigating.

A. The only thing that I can tell you is that the letter related to possible violations of criminal statutes, to the best of my recollection including bribery, tax fraud, extortion and there was, conspiracy. That's my recollection of it and please don't hold me to the total accuracy of it. That's the best I can recall.

Q. Prior to the time your counsel told the U.S. Attorney that you were not trying to impede the investigation, were any contacts made with the U.S. Attorney either authorized by you or encouraged by you to the U.S. Attorney to gain information?

A. Not to my knowledge. Certainly not authorized or encouraged by me.

Q. Were you aware, during your career in Maryland, of an atmosphere of corruption there under the administrations that had preceded you?

A. No, I wasn't.

Q. I'd like to ask you, sir, do these charges that you call 'damn lies' make you more or less in the mood for running for President in 1976?

A. Well, as you can well imagine, this is a singularly distressing situation for any public official to find himself in, regardless of how scurrilous or inaccurate such charges may be, and I've never enjoyed, I suppose, any kind of assault upon my integrity. I'm not really thinking about that right now. I'm thinking about affirming my—having my innocence affirmed in these matters.

Q. Have you heard of any of these contractors connected with your investigation which have been investigated before by the Justice Department and

tied to any of the other investigations we've had in recent years of Baltimore contractors?

A. I'm not really in a position to know that. I don't know.

Q. A couple of details, sir. Could you tell us the month, the approximate time that you made the President aware, I would suppose, very shortly after that.

A. My attorney contacted the prosecutor in April. I made the President aware, I would suppose, very shortly after that.

Q. Is this attorney who contacted the prosecutor, from Paul Weiss, Rifkind, Garrison and Wharton, or is it your Washington attorney?

A. This is my Washington attorney, Mr. Judah Best.

Q. Mr. Vice President, have you or your attorneys made any attempt to obtain FBI or Justice Department files in connection with this investigation?

A. No, we have not.

Q. Will they?

A. I don't think so. I don't think that would—I would not encourage any kind of approach to this case that would allow me privileges not readily available to any person under investigation.

Q. Mr. Vice President, could you talk a little bit about the period to which these charges refer? I mean, how did you approach your dealings with the contractors? What kind of ethics did you have, did you feel that you had, when you dealt with them?

A. I did not deal with contractors. At all. I had some people who were in the engineering business who were long-time friends and political supporters. I did not ever have any financial transactions with these people. I did consult with them. I did listen to their complaints. I did allow them access, as most political figures do to persons who are supportive of their political campaigns.

Q. Did any of these contractors ever offer anything approaching a bribe or any . . . ?

A. I don't know who "those contractors" are. So I can't answer that question. But I will say that, and I can't remember the exact circumstances—it's a matter of news record. Way back in county records at one time, I was offered a bribe and I reported the bribe.

Q. Mr. Vice President, I may be legally unsound in this question, but it is possible you might wish to request a grand jury to hear you, waiving your immunity and telling your story to them so that they will have all the facts from your point of view?

A. I think in matters approaching the legal procedures, I must suppress the natural inclination of a lawyer to think he knows how to run his own case—to conduct his own response to an investigation—and listen to my counsel. This is very hard for a lawyer to do. And I understand lawyers are the worst clients in the world.

Q. After you sent word through Gen. Haig about this matter to the President, did you ever speak to him personally about it, before your meeting with him yesterday?

A. I may have spoken to him very



briefly in the course of other discussions, about it, indicating that as far as I knew, since contact had been established between the prosecutor and my attorney, that there had been no indication that the prosecutor was in any way concerned about any allegations that had been made against me. That would have been probably back in May or sometime around that time.

**Q.** When was the last time you had any income other than from government salaries?

**A.** Well, you mean income to me or income that went through my account? I did have some income that went through my account, when the Agnew tee shirts and watches came out and I wanted to take advantage of those things for charity, and as a matter of fact, I think about \$35,000 went through my account that was given to the Mexican children and to some other charities. Aside from that, I've had income in my account from some mutual funds that are in a blind trust that I established when I became Vice President. And of course, I had some income from some stock investments that didn't relate to the State of Maryland when I was governor. But all these things have been reported in my income taxes and incidentally, I might add that my income taxes have been professionally prepared by a large accounting organization since 1967, and of course, that's the date that begins the investigation.

#### Under a Cloud?

**Q.** Since your legal situation is more delicate and maybe more immediate than President Nixon's, could you tell us why you're having a press conference and he hasn't had one for so long?

**A.** The best answer I can give you to that is that President Nixon hasn't received a letter from the United States Attorney telling him he's under investigation.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, to follow that, do I understand that . . . ?

**A.** Let me just continue this. And I think the matter of how President Nixon is going to respond to the matters that are being discussed currently regarding him is a matter for his own determination, and I want to repeat, I have absolutely total confidence in him and the fact that his response is going to be entirely satisfactory.

**Q.** You're not suggesting that a U.S. Attorney's letter could produce a press conference?

**A.** Well, all I can tell you is, a U.S. Attorney's letter is not the kind of thing that makes you feel comfortable.

**Q.** Do I understand, Mr. Vice President, that you got the letter from the U.S. Attorney last week and you did not at the time inform the President?

**A.** I got the letter on Aug. 2 and I informed the President through Gen. Haig immediately.

**Q.** Of the letter?

**A.** Of the letter, but I did not speak with the President until yesterday.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, when you first learned of this in February, did you start recording your official conversations so you have some tapes?

**A.** No.

**Q.** I have a doubleheader, if I may. First of all, what proportion of your workday is this business taking up, and secondly, might there be such a thing as a "Watergate atmosphere" that gave rise to this?

**A.** Well, the first—the answer to the first question is, I'd be a very dishonest if I didn't say that in the past—since I've received this letter, it hasn't taken up a very large portion of my work day. It has. I do not intend to let it interfere with the execution of my Vice Presidential duties. I have appearances scheduled; I intend to keep

those appearances. I've had a very busy month and the matter has not affected me and my work schedule up until the time I received this letter. We've been very occupied with a succession of foreign visitors, and I've been involved in those visits. I've had, as people in this room probably know better than anyone else, a rather unusual number of interviews recently and I have made quite a few other appearances. Now, the second part of your question concerning the Watergate atmosphere. If I said I thought that was involved in this, I'd have to say if I were in your position, listening to that, that that was a self-serving declaration. I'll leave to your judgment whether it is or not.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, there are a great many other people in the administration who are, to say the least, under a cloud. Could you tell us what there is in the administration that has led to this state of affairs?

**A.** Well, I'm not sure that I'm ready to characterize myself as under a cloud, and I assume that when you say other people, you imply that I am. What a cloud is, is often in the eyes of the beholder. And I think that for me to try to respond to that, where you are obviously applying one set of criteria and I another, would be an exercise in futility.

#### Premature Judgment

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, are you satisfied with the White House statement, through a deputy press secretary

—a rather grudging expression of confidence in you?

**A.** Let me say this: I think the Vice President of the United States should stand on his own feet. It really isn't that important what a President says, although I welcome the President's support, and as I would reassert, he has given me it, unequivocally. But I think the office of Vice President is an important enough one that the man has to stand on his own feet, so I'm not spending my time looking around to see who's supporting me. I'm defending myself.

**Q.** Could you speak to specifics of the charges against you?

**A.** I could not, because I'm not aware of the specifics.

**Q.** You used the term "damn lies" and "scurrilous," I think you referred to the newspapers . . . ?

**A.** That's one of my favorite words, I guess . . .

**Q.** . . . To refer to newspaper reports about the inquiry. Did you mean that also to apply to whatever allegations or evidence . . . ?

**A.** You'd have to give me some specifics. I think you're making a great transference and jump, without giving me any specifics.

You know that I have said nothing that could be interpreted as even mildly critical of the news media for an awful long time.

**Q.** Well, Mr. Vice President, I'm still a little curious about the sequence of events. If you sent your attorney to talk to the U.S. Attorney in Baltimore, he must have said something to your attorney that would lead you to believe that you were under investigation at that point. It wouldn't have taken . . .

**A.** He did not. All he said was, he welcomed that avenue of communications. And that he would keep my attorney advised, if he felt that there was any necessity for it.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, before that, did anyone either directly or indirectly threaten to drag you into this unless you helped to kill the Baltimore County investigation?

**A.** Well, I'm not going to respond to that question at this time. Because it's premature for me to make such judgments.

If you say with a direct contact with me, I would say no. I don't want to make any assertions in a matter this sensitive that I am not absolutely sure are accurate. And I'm not going to foreclose the possibility that such things may have happened. Neither am I going to assert at this moment that they did.

**Q.** Did anyone ask you to kill an investigation in Baltimore county?

**A.** No, no one asked me to do it.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, will you release the letter?

**A.** Will I release the letter?

**Why not?** Yes.

**Q.** Do you think it at all possible that this investigation was begun in order to counteract talk about impeachment of Mr. Nixon?

**A.** I have no idea about the motives of the investigation. But let me say this: I have no reason to suspect that the prosecutors in Baltimore are antagonistic. I don't even know these gentlemen, with the exception of the U.S. Attorney, whom I know very casually.

And for me to suspect some kind of nefarious conduct on their part would be, I think, a little paranoid. I don't. I am concerned, as I said in my opening statement—very concerned about the fact that these leaks in the news media are identified by the news media as leaks coming from sources close to the federal investigation.

I'm going to take two more questions.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, did you say a while ago that you were offered a bribe at one time?

**A.** I reported on the fact in Baltimore County many years ago, before I became county executive, as I recall, that I was.

**Q.** Did you report it to authorities?

**A.** I did not, at that time, report it. I mentioned it and reported it later on. If you want to ask me why I didn't report it, I can only say that I was very inexperienced and quite uninformed about such matters at the time.

**Q.** You mentioned awhile ago about someone being naive if they didn't know something about the way contractors do business. But I didn't quite get what you were saying, now . . .

**A.** We'll give you the transcript.

**Q.** Mr. Vice President, I don't understand to what extent you are willing to cooperate with the prosecuting attorneys in the investigation. To what extent are you willing to turn over your personal and financial records?

**A.** I'm going to answer that again, and this is the last question I'll take. As I said before, I have nothing to hide. I will make available at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way to the appropriate authorities, as determined after consultation with my counsel, whatever records, my own body for interrogation—whatever is needed. But I'm not going to make those judgments at this time. As you know, there are certainly highly unprecedented Constitutional questions that must be considered, so I'm not foreclosing any result in that respect, I'm not going to be able to reach that at this time. Thank you.