

First the Small Fry, Then Agnew

By Joe Nawrozki

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BALTIMORE — A corruption-hunting federal grand jury will resume hearing secret testimony later this week in a probe of Maryland politics that has reached from lowly county ward hacks into the board rooms of big business and the office of the Vice President of the United States.

Reliable sources indicate the 23-member panel will be asked to return indictments against several mid-level Baltimore County political figures before delving into charges of possible extortion, bribery and conspiracy involving Spiro T. Agnew.

The panel has not met since George Beall, the U.S. attorney for Maryland, went on vacation late last month. He will return to his office Monday and is expected to conclude the Baltimore County phase of the investigation before facing the legally complex and politically delicate Agnew issue.

But before Beall makes a move, he must await word from U.S. Attorney General Elliott Richardson on whether evidence gathered thus far against the Vice President is strong enough for indictment.

Richardson also must rule on the question of whether a Vice President can be indicted for a crime without first being impeached.

Court House sources here contend that Beall, a Nixon appointee and younger brother of a U.S. senator, already has sufficient evidence to take before the grand jury but is strictly adhering to Justice Department orders by waiting for a decision from Richardson.

The grand jury thus far has indicted only one person, Baltimore County Executive Dale Anderson, a position Agnew held before becoming governor of Maryland in 1966.

Anderson was charged on August 23 on 39 counts in connection with an alleged kickback scheme involving him and engineering consultants that have done business with the county.

But other figures in the area have been nervously glancing over their shoulders for the subpoena servers.

While the Agnew end of the investigation deals with unknown instances of alleged kickbacks while he

served as governor, a reliable source said a major focus of the probe is the entire financial picture surrounding the Parallel Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

The \$120 million span, which was the object of \$36 million worth of cost overruns and which was 16 months late in being completed, was proposed by then Gov. Agnew in 1966.

Legislation authorizing the project was brought to a statewide referendum in a petition led by Democratic Rep. Clarence Long. The citizens defeated the proposal by more than 40,000 votes.

But despite the resounding defeat, the Agnew administration quickly revived the project with approval from the 1967 session of the General Assembly.

Agnew and Marvin Mandel, then the speaker of the House who eventually was elected governor, carried the program through anyhow and had it approved in an 11th-hour victory before the Legislature convened.

It was pushed through on an emergency bill, a measure which could not be stopped by opponents who would have immediately placed the issue once again before the voters.

The emergency bill, if so intended, could not have been stopped until after the bridge projects was started.

And here is where a key figure in the Agnew probe enters the picture. He is Jerome B. Wolff, a Chicago-born lawyer and engineer specializing in environmental matters.

At the time of the second bay bridge controversy, Wolff headed the now defunct State Roads Commission. He was appointed to the post by Agnew.

With the power of his position, Wolff named the J. E. Greiner Co. the kingfish of local consultants, to design the span and oversee construction. The Greiner firm was initially paid \$5.4 mil-

lion for the job but received \$1 million more for added costs.

Sources now say that Wolff is one of several influential businessmen co-operating with government prosecutors in turn for limited immunity from prosecution.

Other figures reportedly linked to the probe include:

I. H. (Bud) Hammerman, one of the leading financial and civic personalities in Baltimore, whose family controls a thriving mortgage and banking business. He is a long-time friend and political confidante of Agnew and served as campaign chairman when Agnew ran for governor in 1966.

Lester Matz, successful engineer and partner in the Towson, Md., based consulting engineering firm of Matz, Childs and Associates. The firm is nationally known and performed extensive work for the State of Maryland when Agnew was governor. Both Matz and Childs contributed to Agnew campaigns in the past.

J. Walter Jones, another close Agnew associate who is a wealthy Annapolis banker and real estate man. He has been a primary fund raiser in Republican politics in general and Agnew campaigns in particular.

Both Matz and Hammerman have reportedly been co-operating with government investigators in return for limited immunity or reduced charges.

But as the case inched closer to the nation's second most powerful political leader, a knowledgeable source in Annapolis, the state capital, has this ironic observation:

"The man deserves every right to be presumed innocent but it's not the first whisper of foul ball here.

"And isn't it odd that the Parallel Bay Bridge should surface as perhaps the pivo-

tal object of the whole episode . . ."

The bridge, which was opened on July 4 with the announcement that annual summer traffic jams would disappear, failed to provide that panacea for tens of thousands of shore-bound motorists.