

Jury to Hear Agnew Case
-- He Asks House for Probe

Nixon's Statement On Case

Washington

President Nixon asked the American people last night to give Vice President Spiro Agnew "the basic, decent consideration and presumption of innocence that are both his right and his due."

At the end of another day of furious rumors, counter-rumors, announcements and denials, the White House issued a 250-word statement that constituted Mr. Nixon's strongest endorsement of his vice president since Agnew's legal difficulties began.

The President called the vice president to the Oval Office yesterday morning for an hour-and-fifteen-minute meeting. Referring to that conversation in his statement, Mr. Nixon said:

"The vice president again, as he had done in our previous meetings, denied the charges that have been made against him."

Agnew, the President continued, "has served his country with dedication and distinction and has won the respect of millions of Americans for the candor and courage with which he has addressed the controversial issues of our time." Now, the President said, Agnew faced a "difficult period."

CLIMAX

The vice president's struggle for political survival appeared to be heading toward a climax with Mr. Nixon's statement, a decision to send evidence to a Baltimore grand jury and Agnew's subsequent request for a congressional investigation.

Mr. Nixon -- whose aides

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* Complete quotation would begin "During these past 4½ years, the Vice president has served ..."

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have been unofficially and indirectly suggesting, then officially denying, that Agnew should resign -- had met at 8:30 a.m. with Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson and the assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division, Henry E. Petersen, to receive an evaluation of the Agnew investigation.

Then, for the first time since the vice president was accused of having accepted kickbacks while governor of Maryland, the President summoned him to a conference. The previous Nixon-Agnew meetings have been requested by Agnew as part of his effort to cling to office.

Gerald L. Warren, the deputy White House press secretary, disclosed the meeting at the regular morning briefing in response to questions. He had omitted any mention of it in announcing Mr. Nixon's schedule.

Warren said Mr. Nixon and Agnew had again agreed that there would be no comment on the substance of the meeting. But almost immediately, he denied that the vice president had resigned, denied that Mr. Nixon had asked him to resign and denied that anyone in the White House was pressing him to resign.

When Warren was asked, however, whether the vice president had offered to resign, he returned to his earlier refusal to discuss what had been said.

One middle-level official said later, "the deal has been made and Agnew's through." Late in the afternoon, the Dow-Jones News Service reported that the vice president had indeed offered his resignation and that the Justice Department had agreed to allow him to plead guilty to one relatively minor charge.

Agnew's attorneys, Judah

Best of Washington and Martin London and Jay H. Topkis of New York, had been attempting to negotiate a deal.

No sooner had the Dow-Jones report appeared than Marsh Thompson, Agnew's news secretary, denied it. He reported that the vice president was "in fine fettle -- as determined and calm as I've ever seen him."

Thompson also reported that Agnew has decided to cancel a speech tomorrow in Pebble Beach, Calif., to remain on hand for consultations with his lawyers. But he said the vice president planned to keep another speech date in Los Angeles Saturday.

JURY

The denials appeared to be borne out still later when Richardson issued a statement announcing that evidence against Agnew would be presented tomorrow to the Baltimore grand jury that is investigating the corruption charges. He said the plea-bargaining with the Agnew lawyers had broken down.

It was not clear whether Richardson had sought -- or received -- Mr. Nixon's approval before authorizing the presentation of evidence. One usually informed White House source said, however, that that had been the purpose of their early-morning meeting yesterday.

According to the same source, the President discussed the Agnew situation at length Monday night with his chief of staff, Alexander M. Haig Jr., aboard the presidential yacht Sequoia.

Jerry Landauer, a Wall Street Journal reporter who was the author of the Dow-Jones report, refused to comment on the circumstances of its publication.

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