

Nixon Pressure on Agnew Described

Washington

While publicly maintaining support for the former vice president, President Nixon tried through aides to persuade Spiro T. Agnew to resign in the face of Agnew's possible indictment or impeachment last fall, according to a new book on the Agnew case.

Eventually, the White House demanded Agnew's resignation, the book says.

The White House maneuvering is described in the book "A Heartbeat Away," by Washington Post reporters Richard M. Cohen and Jules Witcover.

Alexander Haig, chief of the White House staff, is said to have served as the chief go-between for Mr. Nixon in dealings with Agnew and his attorneys.

Agnew eventually made a deal with the Justice Department, resigned October 10, and pleaded no contest to a single charge of income tax evasion.

Cohen and Witcover describe how the original investigation of political kickbacks in Maryland's Baltimore county led eventually to Agnew and resulted in his becoming the highest-ranking U.S. government of-

ficial ever to resign under threat of criminal charges.

Mr. Nixon, according to the authors, had to decide how to deal with Agnew because the President personally faced possible implication in the Watergate scandal and did not want to set a precedent that could affect his own case.

In particular, the book says, Mr. Nixon was worried about Agnew following what was called the "impeachment track"; by taking his case to the House of Representatives.

"This option . . . was fraught with ominous parallel for the President himself," the authors write. "If Agnew could be impeached and convicted, then perhaps it would not be so difficult for the now-reluctant congressmen to place Nixon on the same track and ride him out of office.

"Also, an Agnew impeachment trial would raise in unavoidable terms the basic constitutional question vexing the Watergate-plagued President: Was impeachment the mandatory first step for a president or vice president accused of crime, or could he be indicted first in a court of law? Finally, once committed to the impeachment track, Agnew

would be much less likely to agree to the swift, surgical solution that the President wanted — his resignation."

Finally, on September 10, "despairing that Agnew would ever take the hint" to resign, Haig and presidential counsel J. Fred Buzhardt met with Agnew and one of his lawyers and laid out the case before them, the book says.

Haig, "abandoning the White House's addition for circumlocution and subtlety . . . let Agnew have it," says the book. "The vice president had to resign. It was a simple, straightforward demand, and Haig kept hammering away at it."

Agnew finally left the discussion to his attorney and the White House representatives, but this conversation, according to the authors, was the decisive one, which led to Agnew's decision to "plea bargain" with the Justice Department for the best deal he could get — a deal that the government lawyers insisted would have to include his resignation.

The book is being published today by the Viking Press.

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