

Why Agnew Wasn't Tried

Baltimore

According to the chief prosecutor in the Spiro T. Agnew case, one of the reasons the former vice president was allowed to plead no contest to reduced charges was fear that he might become President.

The no contest plea ended the Agnew case quickly, whereas a full trial could have dragged on for months or years before final resolution.

"As vice president, Mr. Agnew was next in line to become President," U.S. Attorney for Maryland George Beall said Tuesday. "If something happened to the President—death, assassination or resignation—Agnew would have become president.

"It was unthinkable by this office and the U.S. Justice Department to allow this to occur," Beall said, "knowing what we did about Mr. Agnew's past."

Asked if the possibility that Agnew might become President led to plea bargaining which allowed Agnew to escape a possible prison sentence, Beall said, "That was one of the considerations—that was an important one."

Agnew pleaded no contest Oct. 10, 1973, to a single charge of income tax evasion and resigned from office. In return, federal prosecutors agreed not to seek criminal indictments on allegations he was involved in a kickback scheme.

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