

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

Copyright 1996 The Washington Post  
The Washington Post

September 19, 1996, Thursday, Final Edition

**NAME:** SPIRO T. AGNEW

**SECTION:** METRO; Pg. B07; OBITUARY

**LENGTH:** 2833 words

**HEADLINE:** Nixon Vice President Spiro T. Agnew Dies

**BYLINE:** Bart Barnes, Washington Post Staff Writer

**BODY:**

Spiro T. Agnew, 77, who died of acute leukemia Sept. 17 in Berlin, Md., was the first U.S. vice president to resign under a cloud of personal scandal when he stepped down in 1973 and only the second ever to quit the nation's second-highest office. A former governor of Maryland, he used the vice presidency for almost five years as a highly visible pulpit to build a national reputation as a sharp-tongued and hard-hitting attack spokesman for his president, Richard M. Nixon.

But his influence at the highest levels of the Nixon administration was virtually negligible. "I was never allowed to come close enough to participate with him directly in any decision," Mr. Agnew recalled in his memoirs, published in 1980. Expecting an important assignment from the president as a reward for his hard work as Nixon's running mate in their 1972 reelection campaign, Mr. Agnew was told by presidential aide John D. Ehrlichman, "We think you ought to spend most of your time working on the Bicentennial." He turned down that assignment.

Mr. Agnew died about 6:30 p.m. at Atlantic General Hospital in Berlin. He was taken ill at his summer home in nearby Ocean City, Md. Family members said he had been in apparent good health and was feeling well until shortly before his death.

His resignation as vice president came after a plea of no contest to a single count of federal income tax evasion, and it capped an extensive investigation into allegations of bribery and extortion covering the years in which he held public office at the state and county level. It came only 10 months before Nixon himself resigned the presidency in the face of impeachment proceedings related to the 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate.

The two resignations resulted in the presidency of Gerald R. Ford, whom Nixon had appointed to replace Agnew. Ford was the first United States chief executive never to have been elected either president or vice president.

As an attack man for the Nixon administration, Mr. Agnew cultivated a loyal and enthusiastic constituency of his own. He was a superb and articulate public speaker and a master rhetorician who became a champion of law and order and an arch critic of what many believed to be a climate of public permissiveness. He came to be recognized as an unofficial spokesman for the class of Americans often described as the "silent majority." Those were the millions of ordinary people who felt disaffected and alienated by the social dissonance of that period.

Mr. Agnew won over their hearts and minds by speaking out against the likes of strident protests against the war in

## Nixon Vice President Spiro T. Agnew Dies The Washington Post September 1

Vietnam, disruptive street demonstrations, rebellion and building takeovers on college campuses, civil rights militants, a rising crime rate and disrespect for law and order.

"A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals," he declared, and his remarks were widely circulated in the national media, of which he also was severely critical. The United States, he said, was being unfairly maligned by ". . . the nattering nabobs of negativism. They have formed their own 4-H Club -- the hopeless, hysterical hypochondriacs of history."

Within months of beginning his second term as vice president in January 1973, Mr. Agnew was being widely mentioned as a candidate for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination. He had every intention of running, he said later. In the public eye, he was perceived as a man of candor and integrity, a politician who did not mince words and called things the way he saw them. During the winter of 1973, he toured the Far East, meeting with heads of state as a special emissary of Nixon's. In Saigon, he met with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu to discuss postwar relations. He conferred with Cambodian President Lon Nol in Phnom Penh. These were "substantive discussions," White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler had said in announcing the trip. Returning to the United States, Mr. Agnew assumed the mantle of a statesman.

Despite that public image, Mr. Agnew was a virtual nonperson in the inner circles of the Nixon administration. He recalled in his 1980 book on the events leading to his resignation, "Go Quietly . . . Or Else," that when he spoke up at a Cabinet meeting shortly after taking office in 1969, presidential assistant H.R. "Bob" Haldeman chastised him for it. "The president does not like you to take an opposite view at a Cabinet meeting, or say anything that can be construed to be mildly not in accord with his thinking," Mr. Agnew quoted Haldeman as saying.

Any presidential ambitions that Mr. Agnew may have had soon collapsed. He resigned as vice president on Oct. 10, 1973, after an extensive federal investigation into allegations of bribery and extortion that covered a 10-year period that included his governorship and a term as Baltimore county executive. After intense plea-bargaining sessions with federal prosecutors, he was fined \$ 10,000 and sentenced to three years of unsupervised probation for evading payment of \$ 13,551 in income taxes for 1967.

In return for Mr. Agnew's no contest plea, the government agreed not to prosecute him on charges of bribery and extortion. Those allegations were spelled out in a 40-page document submitted to the court by the Department of Justice. The document accused the former vice president of having accepted at least \$ 87,500 in bribes and kickbacks from architects and engineers in return for work in Maryland on state and county highway and bridge projects. Mr. Agnew denied those charges.

Only John C. Calhoun, who quit as Andrew Jackson's vice president in 1832, had resigned from the office before Mr. Agnew. Calhoun left the vice presidency because of disagreements with Jackson and after being elected to the Senate from South Carolina.

Spiro Theodore Agnew was born in Baltimore on Nov. 9, 1918. His father, Theodore S. Anagnostopoulos, had emigrated from Greece in 1897 and had shortened the family name to Agnew. His mother, Margaret Akers Agnew, was a native Virginian. The future governor and vice president attended Johns Hopkins University, where he studied chemistry for three years, then withdrew to attend night classes at the University of Baltimore law school.

During World War II, he participated in combat operations in France and Germany and was awarded a Bronze Star.

After the war, Mr. Agnew returned to the law school and received a degree in 1947. Like so many returning veterans, he moved to the suburbs, settling with his family in Towson, Md., where he opened a law practice. He joined the Kiwanis Club and Veterans of Foreign Wars. In 1942, he had married Elinor Isabel Judefind, and they subsequently had four children. During the 1950s, he served as president of the parent-teacher associations at his children's schools.

He became a Republican at the suggestion of a senior law associate, who saw that path as a quick way to get ahead

in politics. There was a 4 to 1 ratio of Democrats to Republicans in Baltimore County, where Mr. Agnew had settled. The competition for party leadership would be easier as a Republican, and Republican contacts could steer law business Mr. Agnew's way.

He campaigned for Republican candidates and, in 1957, was rewarded with an appointment to the Baltimore County Board of Zoning Appeals, which reviewed land use decisions. A year later, he became chairman, and over time, he developed a reputation as a defender of sound zoning practices.

In 1962, he ran for Baltimore county executive as a Republican reform candidate, in an election in which two former Democratic Party allies had split their party in an unusually bitter primary battle. Mr. Agnew became the first Republican elected to the county's highest office since 1895. In four years as county executive, he presided over an administration that built new schools and roads, raised teacher salaries and improved water and sewage systems.

With the Democrats politically dominant in Maryland, Mr. Agnew was the ranking Republican officeholder, and in 1966, he ran for governor.

His opponent that year was George P. Mahoney, a Baltimore paving contractor and perennial office seeker who had survived a bitter three-way primary to capture the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Seeking to capitalize on an anti-civil rights backlash, Mahoney made opposition to open-housing legislation the keystone of his campaign, and he chose as his slogan, "Your Home Is Your Castle. Protect it."

Compared with Mahoney, Mr. Agnew was the candidate of racial reason and progressiveness. By the thousands, black voters and liberal Democrats crossed party lines to vote Republican, and Mr. Agnew was elected easily, taking 50 percent of the votes to Mahoney's 40 percent in a state where Democrats enjoyed a 3 to 1 majority. As governor, Mr. Agnew delivered on most of his campaign promises. At his urging, the legislature approved a budget that included increased aid to antipoverty programs and local government, enacted an open-housing law applicable to all but privately owned dwellings, updated state public-accommodations laws to bring them into conformity with federal regulations and repealed prohibitions against interracial marriage. A flat, 3 percent state income tax was replaced with a graduated 3 to 5 percent levy, a liberalized abortion law was passed and strict water pollution controls were implemented.

To many of the liberal voters who had supported Mr. Agnew in 1966, it seemed that the governor took a sharp turn to the right in his second year in office. In April 1968, a contingent of black students from Bowie State College arrived in Annapolis to protest conditions at their school. When they refused to leave the Maryland State House at the close of the business day, Mr. Agnew ordered all 227 of them arrested.

That was the same day that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. Over the next few days, rioting broke out in the black neighborhoods of major urban centers across the nation, including Baltimore and Washington. Mr. Agnew called 80 moderate black leaders, many of whom had been his supporters, to a meeting in Baltimore. There, he castigated them for failing to repudiate certain black militants, whom he described as "Hanoi-visiting, caterwauling, riot-inciting burn-America-down types." It was a "perverted concept of race loyalty," and a fear of being called an "Uncle Tom," that prevented the moderate blacks from speaking out, the governor said. His audience was insulted, and many walked out.

Later that year, when the Poor People's Campaign was encamped on federal parkland near the Lincoln Memorial, Mr. Agnew described the protesters as "the so-called poor people with Cadillacs."

On the national level of Republican Party politics, he was an ardent supporter of New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller in the early months of jockeying for the 1968 presidential nomination. When Rockefeller declined to run, Mr. Agnew met with Nixon in New York, and the two were mutually impressed. Mr. Agnew soon began working for Nixon's nomination.

At the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Mr. Agnew placed Nixon's name in nomination for the

presidency. Nixon chose the Maryland governor as his vice president.

"There is a mysticism about men," Nixon said later. "There is a quiet confidence. You look a man in the eye and you know he's got it -- brains. This guy has got it."

On the campaign trail that fall, Mr. Agnew promised a Nixon-Agnew administration crackdown on crime in the streets and "stylish forms of discontent." He ridiculed the report of the President's Commission on Civil Disorders, which had called for a massive infusion of money and effort to cure the causes of rioting in the black urban ghettos of America. "If one wants to pinpoint the causes of the riots, it would be this permissive climate and the misguided compassion of public opinion," Mr. Agnew said.

Elected on Nov. 5, 1968, the Nixon-Agnew ticket captured 302 of a possible 538 electoral college votes. The popular vote was 43.48 percent for Nixon-Agnew to 42.97 percent for the Democratic ticket of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine). An Independent Party ticket of Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace and retired Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay took 13.3 percent of the vote.

Although he was given little of substance to do in the Nixon presidency, Mr. Agnew was a good soldier and didn't complain. There was talk about his being replaced on the 1972 ticket, but it was short-lived. Sen. Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona, one of the party's leading figures, came to his defense.

"The vice president has built himself into a national figure with courage enough to say things that should be said," Goldwater declared. "Any suggestion about dumping him at this time will alienate Republican workers across the country. Agnew's popularity equals that of the president." In November 1972, the Nixon-Agnew ticket was reelected in a landslide, losing only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia.

In the meantime, in the office of the U.S. attorney in Baltimore, an investigation was underway into allegations that officeholders in Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County had taken kickbacks from architects and engineers in exchange for government business. As the probe developed, witnesses told investigators that Mr. Agnew had received some of those payments.

Ultimately, the government developed a case in which Mr. Agnew was charged with taking a total of \$ 87,500 in kickbacks from two firms, plus untabulated kickbacks from five other firms and a bank. Because of the plea bargain, he never faced a criminal trial on those charges, but the State of Maryland filed a civil suit against him in 1982 seeking a return of the money. A judge ruled that he had, in fact, accepted the funds, and he was ordered to pay \$ 268,482 -- the amount of the kickbacks plus interest. Although he continued to maintain his innocence, Mr. Agnew did not appeal the decision, and he paid the money.

After his resignation, he also faced a demand from the Internal Revenue Service for \$ 150,000 in back taxes plus interest and penalties. He paid that with the proceeds of a \$ 200,000 loan from singer Frank Sinatra, who had befriended him during his vice presidency. By 1978, he had repaid Sinatra in full, Mr. Agnew said.

Initially, on learning of the charges pending against him, Mr. Agnew had sworn never to resign. But he had been under intense pressure, he said, from top aides to Nixon, who was then preoccupied with controversies surrounding the Watergate break-in and the subsequent coverup. Eight days after Agnew's resignation came the resignation of Elliot L. Richardson, who as attorney general had authorized prosecution of the vice president. Richardson and his deputy, William D. Ruckelshaus, both quit after refusing Nixon's order to fire special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox, who was pressing for the release of tape-recordings of White House conversations, which tended to incriminate the president in the Watergate coverup.

Mr. Agnew finally decided to accept the plea bargain, he said, "in the best interests of the country," and to "spare my family from a brutalizing court fight."

## Nixon Vice President Spiro T. Agnew Dies The Washington Post September 1

After his resignation, he moved to Rancho Mirage, Calif., where he lived in obscurity, avoiding publicity, making no speeches and refusing to grant interviews. He supported a lifestyle of affluence with a secretive international business that he said involved selling communications equipment and uniforms to foreign governments.

In addition to "Go Quietly . . . Or Else," which he dedicated to Sinatra, he wrote a novel, "The Canfield Decision." It is a story of political intrigue involving a vice president who advocates the arming of Israel with nuclear weapons and finds that he has played into the hands of various extremists and terrorists.

When Nixon died in 1994, Mr. Agnew went to the funeral because "I decided after 20 years of resentment to put it all aside." He said he hadn't talked to Nixon since the day he resigned, refusing to take several calls from Nixon because "I felt totally abandoned."

In May 1995, he made a rare public appearance, attending a ceremony at the U.S. Senate chamber as his bust was installed among the likenesses of other former vice presidents.

"I'm not blind or deaf to the fact that there are those who feel this is a ceremony that should not take place," Mr. Agnew said at the time.

Mr. Agnew and his wife, who is called Judy, lived half the year in Ocean City and half in Rancho Mirage.

In addition to his wife, survivors include three daughters, Pamela DeHaven of Hagerstown, Md., Susan Bach of LaQuinta, Calif., and Kimberly Fisher of Peterborough, N.H.; a son, James, of Fort Myers, Fla.; seven grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

**GRAPHIC:** Photo, Spiro T. Agnew and Richard M. Nixon gather at the rostrum at the 1968 Republican National Convention in Miami Beach after their acceptance speeches. Spiro Agnew enjoys a dance with his wife, Judy, as Maryland's new governor at the inaugural ball in Baltimore on Jan. 27, 1967. The ranking Republican officeholder, Agnew had defeated George P. Mahoney in the election.

**LOAD-DATE:** September 19, 1996