Historic Last Moments

What they said August 7

PHOENIX, Ariz. (UPI) — The Phoenix — The Phoenix Gazette, which has steadfastly opposed impeachment, said in its afternoon editions Wednesday that President Nixon would resign later in the day (Aug. 7).

The Gazette said:

"President Nixon will resign today and Vice President Gerald Ford will be sworn in as the nation's leader, according to a source the Gazette believes is in a position to know."

The Gazette did not elaborate on its source, but managing editor Alan Moyer told UPI the Washington source was reliable.

"We believe our source is in a position to know, and the source has told us the President will resign today," Moyer said.

The Gazette and its morning counterpart, the Arizona Republic, both owned by Eugene C. Pulliam, have been strong editorial supporters of President Nixon.

Confusion at the eleventh hour

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A Providence, R.I., newspaper said Wednesday President Nixon had definitely decided to resign. White House spokesmen insisted the situation had not changed since Tuesday when Nixon was quoted as saying he would not be "hounded out of office."

The Providence Journal-Bulletin said that President Nixon has made an "irrevocable" decision to resign. The White House initially neither confirmed nor denied it.

"I can't confirm that," Deputy Press Secretary Gerald Warren said in response to a Providence, R.I., Journal-Bulletin story quoting a source close to the President as saying that Nixon has decided to resign and that the decision was irrevocable.

"There is no reason for me this afternoon to add anything to what has been said regarding a resignation," Warren said.

STAYING ON JOB

Another White House aide, communications chief Ken W. Clawson, said that the President is standing by his statement Tuesday that he intends to stay on the job.

The Providence story was written by Douglas C. Wilson, the reporter who broke the Pulitzer Prize winning story on Nixon's taxes last year.

The newspaper quoted the source — described as "an undaunted devotee of the President" — as saying:

PAINFUL DECISION

"The President has come to the conclusion that the national interest may best be served by his resignation, irrespective of the mammoth injustice committed against him that prompted this painful decision on his part."

Warren, under a barrage of questions on whether Nixon would resign, repeatedly told reporters, "The position of the White House has been stated."

HE MAY WAIT

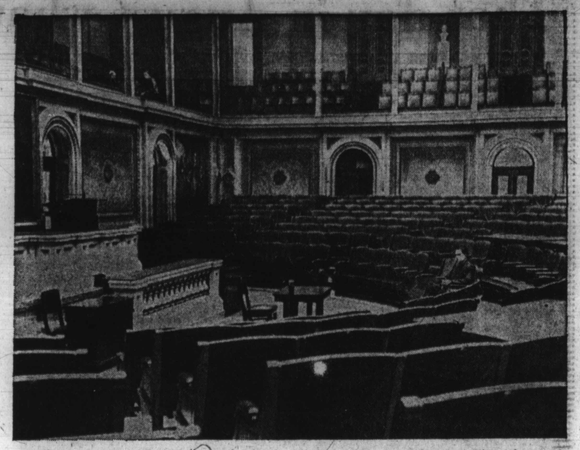
Warren told reporters Tuesday that Nixon told his cabinet that he intended to stay on the job and to allow the constitutional process, meaning impeachment and a possible Senate trial, to run its course.

Warren said that Republican senators who believe Nixon is out of touch with the public "are wrong" in all respects.

When asked whether Nixon would see a Republican delegation which may seek an appointment to demand his resignation, Warren insisted that the question was not before Nixon at this time and would only say "We would meet that when it occurs."

"I know of no meeting with congressional leaders and no direct request," Warren said.

Warren seemed more reticent to answer questions but he repeated several times, "I can tell you the President is aware of the expressions being reported."



ALONE ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE OF HOUSE President Nixon emerged on the political scene in 1946 as a scarcely noticed house member from California's 12th District. In a Jan. 3, 1947 photo, Nixon takes a seat on the Republican side of the House for the first time since his election. (UPI Photo)

Sirica exposed worst scandal in history

By Wesley G. Pippert

WASHINGTON (UPI) — To the public, Richard Nixon said U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica was "a courageous judge." Privately, he called him "a hardliner." Nixon was right both times.

Sirica was 68 years old when he presided over the original Watergate trial, nearing the end of a long career which started as a boy helping his Italian immigrant father in a downtown Washington barber shop.

Worst In History

There is no doubt Sirica played a central role in exposing the worst scandal in American political history.

"I happen to be a Republican, but any decent American — Republican or Democrat — deplores this kind of conduct," Sirica said from the bench during the January, 1973, trial.

Despite criticism, he often scolded lawyers for not being thorough enough, sometimes took over questioning of witnesses himself, and when five of the original seven defendants sought to plead guilty, he grilled them about how and why they got into the plot.

"I Don't Belive You"

"I'm sorry, I don't believe you," Sirica told one witness.

Two months later, on March 23, 1973, the day of sentencing, Sirica read aloud a letter from defendant James W. McCord Jr., alleging there had been perjury at the trial and that defendants had been pressured to plead guilty and keep quiet. As it turned out, Watergate did go higher, much higher.

Sirica imposed provisional maximum sentences on the defendants and told them he would postpone final sentences until he saw how they cooperated with investigators. It was a clear device to make them talk.

What The Hell

Some considered it legally questionable pressure. It worked.

Inside the White House, Nixon and then White House counsel, John W. Dean III were talking. According to edited White House transcripts made public much later, this took place:

Nixon: People break and enter, etc., and get two years. No weapons! No results! What the hell are they talking about?

Sirica

Dean: The individuals who are charged with shooting John Stennis are on the street. They were given, you know, one was put out on his personal recognizance rather than bond. They've got these fellows all stuck with $100,000 bonds. It's the same judge, Sirica, let one guy who is charged with shooting a United States Senator out on the street.

Nixon: Sirica?

Dean: Yes — it is phenomenal.

Nixon: What is the matter with him? I thought he was a hard liner.

Dean: He is . . .

Dean Fired

And six weeks later, in announcing Dean was fired and Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and former White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman had resigned, Nixon praised the American system:

"It was the system that has brought the facts to light and that will bring those guilty to justice — a system that in this case has included a determined grand jury, honest prosecutors, a courageous judge, John Sirica, and a vigorous free press."

At age 70

Sirica retired as chief judge on his 70th birthday in March, 1974, but he continues active on the bench, handling the controversies over the White House tapes and assigning himself to the Watergate cover-up trial scheduled to start in September.

Sirica, who has only a few silver streaks in his coal black hair, sits in his chambers on the second floor of the U.S. Court House and, both reminisces and looks ahead. In almost every other sentence, he interjects, "You know what I mean" or "You know me," said so quickly it comes out as one word.

He proudly pulls out of his desk a news story written by his son, a college student and reporter. He recalls how proud his own father was when he began to make headlines in the 1930s as an aggressive young prosecutor.

He also recalls as a 7-year-old, early in the century, stepping on a stool to help his father lather his customers. He also recalls his father's vigorous sense of right and wrong.

"Maybe that's where I get it," he says.

They went to see what the end would be

By Mike Feinsilber

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Several Republican senators — acting on their own initiative — have sent President Nixon a message urging him to resign, Sen. Edward W. Brooke, R-Mass., said Wednesday.

Sen. Norris H. Cotton, R-N.H., also said the advice had been conveyed to Nixon but both he and Brooke stressed that the action was not undertaken on behalf of all Republican senators.

Brooke, who last Nov. 3 first called on Nixon to resign, predicted the President would step down. "I think he is very seriously considering it now — more seriously than at any time before."

Republican senators met for more than two hours Aug. 7 morning but discussed Nixon's situation for only 20 or 25 minutes. They took no united actions and reached no decisions, members said. They planned to meet again later in the day.

Pressure

The pressure for President Nixon to leave office that began to build Monday when Nixon admitted he had tried to head off a FBI investigation of the Watergate cover-up continued today with some of his previously strongest support dissenting him.

Brooke said he hopes Nixon will step down before the house begins impeachment debate Aug. 19 "Because he would not go down in history as a second President to be impeached."

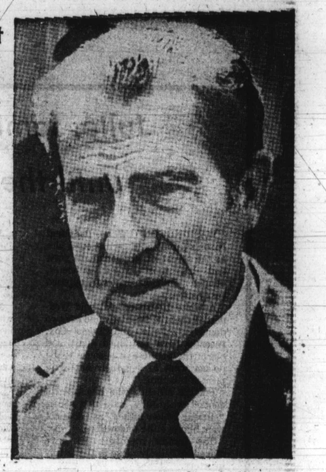
"I think the time is now — the time is right," said Brooke.

Brooke said he felt Nixon "now knows the tenor of the senate; he knows how strongly senators feel. He knows many senators who would rather not have a long and tortuous impeachment trial.

"I can see nothing the President can gain — nothing — unless he honestly believes he would not be convicted. The country has everything to lose and nothing to gain."

Rep. Charles W. Sandman Jr., R-N.J., formerly one of Nixon's most vocal defenders, said today he sees senate conviction of the President as a certainty.

"I can see no sensible reason to hand in, so to speak, in an area where you have absolutely no possibility of winning," Sandman said. "Conviction in the Senate, in my judgment, now is inevitable."



THE PRESIDENT just before entering Bethesda Naval Hospital: "A great effort not to appear sick" (July, 1973)

LONE FRIEND — Mrs. Anna Clinkscales of Baltimore said she is still giving President Nixon morale support. In December, 1973, Mrs. Clinkscales presented President Nixon with a Christmas gift of 10,000 signatures urging him not to resign and asking Congress not to impeach him. Mrs. Clinkscales organized a door-to-door campaign in Baltimore to raise the signatures of support.

Gerald Ford Gets Ready

SEN. EDWARD BROOKE (R-Mass.) is mentioned as the next U.S. Vice President. Aug. 7, he and several Republican senators, acting on their own left Nixon a message at the White House to resign (UPI PHOTO)

By Helen Thomas
UPI WHITE HOUSE Reporter

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Vice President Gerald R. Ford conferred for an hour with White House Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig Wednesday amid reports he is preparing to take over the Presidency should Richard Nixon bow to mounting resignation demands.

Ford's press secretary, Paul Miltich, discounted as "Totally inaccurate" a report by Knight Newspapers which quoted unidentified aides to the Vice President as saying he is moving to "make sure that he is ready" for that contingency.

Miltich said of the Ford-Haig meeting that the two had an "exchange of views on the current situation." Pressed for further details, he said: "I have nothing more to say."

Since Monday, when Nixon made his damaging disclosure that he had helped instigate a Watergate cover-up, Ford has divided his time between the White House and Capitol Hill. Hr said Monday that while he did not disavow his defense of the President in speeches around the country, he would have no more public comment on the subject.

The Knight Newspapers report quoted aides as saying of Ford: "In the last 18 hours, things have changed. He understands what is happening because he is a realist, and because he knows what must be done for the country. He wants sure that he is ready."

The aides were quoted they now felt free to draw contingency policy and personnel plans in case Nixon steps down, although the President told his cabinet, and Ford, at a meeting Tuesday that he had no such intentions.

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER

Meantime the Washington Post reported that Ford is being urged by former defense secretary, Melvin Laird and others to choose former New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller as his Vice President if he assumes the presidency.

Laird, who served as a Nixon adviser for several months after he left the Pentagon, was quoted as saying: "Ford and Rockefeller will form a winning combination for the Republican Party."

The Post quoted two close associates of Rockefeller as saying he would be willing to take the position. This would be subject to majority approval of both Houses of Congress, under the 25th Amendment, as was the case when Nixon chose Ford as Vice President to replace Spiro T. Agnew.

Rep. Charles W. Sandman of New Jersey, one of the 10 Nixon supporters on the House Judiciary Committee who reversed their position following the President's disclosure Monday, also said he thought Rockefeller would "lend a lot" to a Ford Presidency.

Elliot L. Richardson, who resigned as attorney general after Nixon fired special Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox, also has been mentioned as a vice presidential possibility.

Ford attended a Tuesday meeting of all the Republican Senators. But sources said the Vice President left when the subject of presidential resignation came up, and drew applause as he departed.

Sen. Brooke top man to become V.P.

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Sen. Edward W. Brooke, R-Mass., first Senate Republican to call for President Nixon's resignation nine months ago, on Aug. 8 introduced a congressional resolution urging that the President be spared prosecution if he resigned.

Brooke called on the President to resign as "an act of statesmanship" in order to "spare the country a long and harmful impeachment trial." Brooke is the top man slated to become Vice-President.

Brooke's proposal for Congress to state it felt prosecutors should not "bring, conduct or continue criminal or civil proceedings" against Nixon won some support and some opposition.

Such a resolution would have no force of law, and Brooke said the ultimate decision on prosecution would be up to Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Attorney General William B. Saxbe said the same thing Wednesday.

Brooke said earlier on the NBC-TV Today Show that immunity should also apply if Nixon was impeached and removed from office.

Brooke said he had sounded out a number of other senators of both parties, including Democratic leader Mike Mansfield, Republican leader Hugh Scott and Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey.

Brooke, who said last November Nixon should resign because of Watergate involvement, said that from his past background, including a period as a prosecutor in Massachusetts, "I always felt very strongly that when you have achieved a certain result that you don't have to push it through to its final conclusion.

"I believe that the public has a right to know exactly what has been done by President Nixon. But the spectacle of an American President going to jail really distresses me."

Brooke said he felt a resolution would put Congress in a position of sharing responsibility with Jaworski on the matter.

Brooke indicated he felt Nixon critics and others should be satisfied for Nixon "to give up the highest elected office in the country and the world to save the nation from a long and tortuous trial predicted by his own counsel."

Brooke said his proposed sense of Congress resolution "has some support; there is some opposition to it to be sure. There are some who want the President sent to jail."

He said others felt that for the President to step down would be a sufficiently severe penalty.

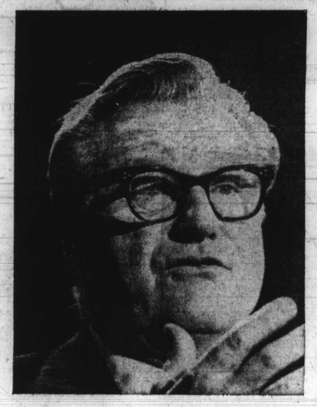
Chairman Peter W. Rodino, D-N.J., of the House Judiciary Committee took a similar position. He said "I would not like to see prosecution" after Nixon left office.

"The impeachment process has as its ultimate goal removal from office," Rodino said. "If we have achieved this objective by voluntary resignation, the purpose of the process has been served."

Sen. Charles H. Percy, R-Ill., said consideration of immunity "might be desirable at some point," but "I think it is premature now."

Percy said he did not feel the issue "should be part of the President's decision" on whether to resign. "I think the President would want this. He wouldn't want this confused with terms under which he might leave."

Agnew went out Oct. 10, '73



GOV. NELSON ROCKEFELLER (N.Y.) announced 12-11-73 that he was resigning effective 12-18-73 to become chairman of the Commission on Critical Choices for Americans, a post many think he used as a springboard for a try for President of the United States. (UPI PHOTO)

By Mike Feinsilber

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Even if the Watergate scandal had not come along, the presidency of Richard M. Nixon would have been stained in history by the resignation in disgrace of his vice president, Spiro T. Agnew.

As it was, Agnew's downfall became just one more crack in a crumbling administration structure.

Agnew joined the Mitchells, Deans, Colsons, Haldemans, Ehrlichmans as symbols of Nixon's proclivity for selecting associates whose removal would become unavoidable.

More than any of the others, though, Agnew personified the Nixon administration. He was its cutting edge.

Agnew toured the country lecturing the young, the antiwar, the media. He defined and attacked "radicals." He scolded "impudent snobs" and "nattering nabobs of negativism" and those who engaged in "pusillanimous pussyfooting."

Phrase

Then, on Oct. 10, 1973, adhering to a carefully negotiated script that allowed him to avoid prison, erect as always, his hands quivering slightly, he stood in a Baltimore court and read a statement in which "I hereby resign the office of Vice President of the United States, effective immediately," he said in a note delivered to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

He was fined $10,000 and placed on three years probation.

Agnew was only the second Vice President to resign, and the first to leave under a legal cloud. In 1832, John C. Calhoun stepped down to fill a Senate seat.

2nd Quitter

Agnew, a Democrat converted to Republicanism, a liberal candidate who in office became a law-and-order hardliner, had a swift and largely accidental political ascension.

Born Nov. 9, 1913, the son of a Greek immigrant restaurateur, he defeated a divided Democratic party machine in 1962 to be elected as executive of Baltimore County, a green suburban zone encircling Baltimore City.

By 1966, the county Democrats seemed certain of regaining control, so Agnew raised his sights and was elected governor of Maryland over a segregationist democratic opponent.

He had held that office only two years when Nixon — triumphant in Miami Beach — tapped him as his running mate. Nixon said he was drawn by a "mystique" he sensed in Agnew.

Dump: Yea Or Nay?

In 1972, Nixon toyed with the idea of dumping Agnew and running with John B. Connally, former Texas governor and former treasury secretary, whose abilities Nixon seemed to hold in awe.

But Agnew had developed his own constituency among conservatives and in the end, Nixon decided to keep the team intact. Agnew told reporters he would not have "put up" with another four years in the vacuity of the No. 2 spot if he did not entertain ideas of seeking the Presidency in 1976.

Agnew

When Agnew's past caught up with him, his removal from office was negotiated between his attorneys and justice department prosecutors. It was approved by Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, who told the court he had agreed to engage in plea bargaining with Agnew for the sake of the nation.

It was "unthinkable," Richardson said, "that this nation should have been required to endure the anguish and uncertainty of a prolonged period in which the man next in line of succession to the presidency was fighting the charges brought against him by his own government."

Closets Cleared

As part of the plea bargaining, Richardson insisted on public disclosure of evidence that Agnew in three elective offices had accepted at least $87,500 plus other "substantial cash payments" in kickbacks and bribes from Maryland contractors doing business with the state.

Agnew asserted his innocence both before and after his appearance in court. He said he resigned to spare the nation a "long, devisive and debilitating struggle in the congress and in the courts."

He took the offensive against his tormentors, counting the prosecutors and the news media among them, accusing them of ruining his reputation through news leaks.

"I Will Not Resign"

The public did not know who to believe or what to think. Eleven days before his resignation, Agnew went before an audience of Republican women in Los Angeles and declared emotionally: "I will not resign if indicted! I will not resign if indicted!"

Desperately eager to believe, the women stood on their chairs and screamed their support.

Nixon, of course, knew. Fully occupied with his own defense against charges being aired before the Senate Watergate Committee, the president took no public role in determining Agnew's fate. He contended himself with expressing confidence in Agnew "during that period he served as Vice President."

When Agnew reached the end, Nixon was gentle and generous. In a letter accepting Agnew's resignation, Nixon wrote:

"As Vice President, you have addressed the great issues of our time with courage and candor. Your strong patriotism, and your profound dedication to the welfare of the nation, have been an inspiration to all who have served with you as well as to millions of others throughout the country."

THE ONE BEFORE LAST, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, was caught by AFRO staff photographer Roman Hankewycz as the man came out in disgrace from the Baltimore Federal Court House Oct. 10, 1973. He had just confessed to the court and pleaded nolo contendere (no contest) to end forever his career as a public official. Later, Agnew was disbarred from the practice of law. All those events brought speculation, "Nixon is next."