

**Because of Nixon's reluctance to share information with Agnew, Agnew remained largely removed from the Watergate investigations. In fact, at one point, Nixon considered the possibility of recruiting Agnew to defend him. Some days later, Nixon learned that Agnew had mentioned to Haldeman that it might be better to have the Watergate case go to a grand jury than to have it aired in the "circus" of the Senate. In a hot Oval Office exchange on May 1<sup>st</sup>, a livid Nixon berated Agnew for getting involved. After relenting a bit, Nixon advises Agnew to stay out of the affair.**

**From *Very Strange Bedfellows*:**

Nixon: "A call [was] made apparently, or one of your people made for you, about a grand jury. A call or a discussion."

Agnew: "I talked to Haldeman."

Nixon [sharply]: "Let me say, I told him [Haldeman] to forget it! It's very important that that be forgotten, you know, because, hell, the thing is only something where you're tangentially involved."

Agnew: "I'm not involved, but it could be political—"

Nixon [briskly interrupting and dragging out the word]: "No! You understand what I mean. You're not involved at all, good God, no. But my point is, Ted, that you've got to be very sure. I don't want anybody ever to think there ever was any discussion between the vice president and members of the White House staff with regard to a grand jury. So if you'll just forget you ever talked to Haldeman. I told Haldeman when he told me about it, I said, 'For God's sake, you forget the vice president ever talked to you about it. You understand? In the present atmosphere— [Agnew tries to break in]—in the present atmosphere, they'll think, well, for God's sake, we were trying to get Glenn Beall's son [the Baltimore prosecutor; Agnew says, "Brother "]. Now, we have done something about it, but I mean, something I think we have. . . in a discreet way, maybe something has been done."

Nixon here seems to be giving Agnew some assurance that he is taking some action to alleviate or eliminate his troubles with the Justice Department, while doing nothing of the sort. He continues with his instructions to stay out of Watergate—for his own sake: "But I wanted you to know by all means, Ted, keep yourself free from all this. You've got to be free, free and independent. In other words, take your own line and the like, and you don't need to get involved in this whole business on the Watergate thing. . . . [Say that] you just have confidence. . . and stay back. You just say all the facts will come out, period. I wouldn't get into a personal position, however."

Agnew: "Mr. President, can I say just a few things? I don't know whether you misconstrued what I did yesterday or not when I called that press conference, but I hope you didn't."

Nixon: "No, I thought it was fine."

Agnew: "The *Times* tried to indicate that I was —"

Nixon: “No, I got your [indication]. What I meant is, they’re gonna be asking you now to say something. Don’t say anything. I’m just telling you, you don’t need to, you see what I mean? You don’t need to say a damn word.”

Agnew [painfully]: “Well, I just wanted you to know. I want to—Mr. President, I’m part of this team.”

Nixon [softening somewhat]: “I know, but look, Ted, you’ve got to keep yourself free for— look, as you well know, there’s you, there’s Reagan, who did call me last night [Agnew chuckles].. . . You’ve got your constituency and I just want you to know as a friend and I want you to be [Agnew interjects, “I appreciate it”] as free as the driven snow here and by golly I understand totally. I think it’s very important that you never be in a position where you appear to be at odds with the president, which I always fully supported with Eisenhower. But on the other hand you’ve got to appear that you are your own man, you see? They will know, because it’s gonna come out, I think, it’s gonna come out. But hell, you don’t have anything like with Haldeman and Ehrlichman and those people. God-damn it, if something happens to them, Mitchell, it’s gonna happen, hell, there’s all there is to it. No reason for you to get involved at all. You didn’t know any more about Watergate than I did. Thank God. Thank God we both didn’t know it was going to hurt. If we had known, too bad we didn’t. We’d have stopped it, we aren’t that dumb.”

Agnew [plaintively]: “I’d like to take this opportunity to express the hope that I might be of more use. I don’t care about—”

Nixon, after saying he has been “thinking about ways” in the reorganization and beginning to sound like a Dutch uncle to Agnew: “Give it some thought, maybe we can find some ways. But I want you to know very much . . . that I don’t expect any favors from you. I don’t want you to get involved. You know what I mean? Don’t get out there. Look, let’s face it. Those bastards in the press, you know what they are, and don’t give them any opportunity to say you’re against the president. Don’t give them any opportunity to say you’re pimping for the president, see my point? Because all they will do then will be to tear you down. Keep yourself up there. You can speak on the issues, that’s the best thing, make the big plays, that’s what I want you to do, and I think it will work out. In a few months, they’ll find something else, because, you know, you’re a fighter [alluding again in an optimistic way to Agnew’s troubles]. Like you were after November third [election day], you were out there, you stuck your neck out, and I understand that, took the press on, and I appreciate that. But don’t do it now. You’ve got just three years before this next election, and by golly if you’re, you know, if you should decide to be a candidate, and God knows who’s going to be it then. But gee whiz, I want you to be in a position where they cannot, in any event and in any way, have anything wrong [on you] that they can tear you down, of something you had nothing to do with.” [Nixon sounds as if he wants Agnew to be his successor, while increasingly saying otherwise among his insiders.]

Agnew [with obvious exasperation]: “I understand what you mean, Mr. President, and I certainly will be guided by that, but [laughing uneasily] I’m more interested in serving these three years, properly.”

Nixon: “Well, if you can think of some things, we will do them. . . . [Then, laughing nervously] There’s lotsa room, now!”

Agnew [changing the subject]: “Well, I think the confrontation that was, has now come about is a good one. It’s over, it’s done.”

Nixon: “No. It’s over for now, but now they’ll zero in on the president.”