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In remarks on the Senate floor today, U.S. Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kans.) called Vice President Spiro T. Agnew "a great American" and termed him "the most controversial Vice President of our times, largely because he has spoken his mind without regard for the tender feelings or political beliefs of those who write and speak the news."

THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

It is time for Republicans to stop being defensive about the Vice President of the United States, about his trip around the world, about his standing as a great American and about his value to our Party. Spiro T. Agnew is a plus as an American, a plus as a Republican and his trip was a plus for the cause of world peace and understanding.

Easy Criticism

It is all too easy for an unknowing press to criticize and it is even easier for those who read the press to echo --- in complete ignorance --- that criticism.

I do not recall that the press was called in to observe the meetings between the Vice President and the heads of state with whom he met on his journey. I do not even recall that they were at the golf games.

Surely, a press that did not know Henry Kissinger had gone to China is not necessarily aware either of what messages the Vice President carried or what assurances he gave or what ruffled feathers he smoothed. And there was no Daniel Ellsberg along to betray a confidence or leak a story.

I have said before that I did not know the purpose of the Vice President's trip. I was not privy to the President's instructions. I do know, however, because it is public knowledge, that the Vice President talked to the leaders of many friendly and allied nations at a crucial and historic time --- at a time when the most delicate of negotiations were being carried out --- and announced --- between our nation and Red China.

I believe it is fortunate and not altogether happenstance that the Vice President was abroad at that time to explain, to assure and to show a calm American presence in an excited world. Where could he have served better at that critical time?

Standard Speculation

Now it is easy to join the press speculation that the Vice President will be replaced on the Republican ticket in 1972. Of course, it is a change from four years ago when there was open speculation that the President would be replaced on the Democrat ticket. But, let me say that I do not know what is in the mind of the Vice President or the President regarding 1972. Like my friend Hubert Humphrey, I am not a prophet. Nor am I a soothsayer.

But I do know from past experience that the press and politicians love to speculate, love to play a guessing game, delight in posing a hypothetical question and then answering as if that hypothetical question were real. "What if?" in our business and in the media too often is assumed to be fact. (MORE)

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We all recall the speculation of the middle 50s that led to Harold Stassen's abortive effort to dump Mr. Nixon in 1956. We remember the speculation about Lyndon Johnson before the assassination of President Kennedy. Our colleague, the former Vice President, Mr. Humphrey, did not go unscathed in this perennial capitol guessing game. So, there is no reason to expect that Spiro Agnew could escape this kind of speculation. Least of all in fact, would we expect Spiro Agnew to escape. He is the most controversial Vice President of our times, largely because he has spoken his mind without regard for the tender feelings or political beliefs of those who write and speak the news. As a matter of fact, he has on occasion even dared to voice criticism of the news media.

Because of this it has been easy, in some news media quarters, for the wish to be the father of the thought, and this in turn has helped to spread the rumor and talk of a dump Agnew movement throughout the capital.

A Washington Pastime

What passes for fact in Washington, D.C., is often less than that in Topeka, or Omaha or Dallas or Seattle or Bangor, Maine. Which is why we hear much about "Dump Agnew" in Washington and almost nothing about "Dump Agnew" in the rest of the country.

In the last seven months, I have traveled through most of the nation. There is a little talk about getting rid of the Vice President; there is a lot of talk about getting him to speak at party functions. Out there, where the people are, Spiro Agnew is admired as a straight talker, a straight shooter and a man of principle.

And I need not point out that out there where the people are is where the votes are, too. It is not necessary for the Senator from Kansas to stand up here in a long defense of the Vice President. He is capable of defending himself, and if necessary, of attacking.

Uncalled-for Criticism

But it seems that the criticisms of recent days, even from the opposition press, have been unduly snide, unfairly harsh and in more than one case, unbelievably inaccurate.

This is the right and the privilege of a free press.

But those of us who know and respect the Vice President have the right and the privilege to respond. I have attempted to do so today.

A Great American

I am proud to call the Vice President a friend. In my opinion he is a great American, and as an American and as a Republican I am proud to support him now or at any time in the future.

As for his recent trip, let me close by pointing out that the President has said that the Vice President did a "fine job" in a substantive area of foreign affairs.

I have no reason to doubt the President's assessment and have seen from the critics no evidence to contradict it.