

VICE

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If one happens to be at loose ends, or needs a job, or is dissatisfied with the prospects in whatever field is occupying one's time, it would appear that the vice-presidency of the United States might be a good solution. The pay is fairly good, housing is provided, the duties are light and primarily ceremonial, and the perquisites are many. And, of course, the prospects for promotion are excellent.

Nine times in one-hundred and eighty-six years the vice-president has succeeded to the presidency. Nine times the man who was chosen to "balance the ticket", or because he was otherwise harmless, or because he was making a nuisance of himself in his home state, or because he was well-known and had no particular enemies, was nominated for the second position, and was promoted.

However, if a man of great political ambition sees the vice-presidency as a step up the ladder or a stopping point on the road to the presidency, let him consult history. Only two men in our history have been elected vice-president, served out their terms, and subsequently been elected president. Neither of them, incidently, are on anybody's list of the most notable or highly regarded chief executives. Martin Van Buren served as vice-president from 1832 to 1836, and was elected president on his own in 1836. Certainly he was no world-beater. Richard Nixon served as vice-president from 1952 to 1960, and then was

elected president in 1968. Certainly he was no world-beater either. These precedents are not encouraging to a would-be climber up the ladder - nor do they inspire the confidence of the country.

Nor do vice-presidents later achieve much in the political arena in other respects. Only one - Levi P. Morton - was later elected a governor. Several did become senators, back in the days when senators were appointed by state legislatures. Only two - Alben Barkley from Kentucky in 1954, and Hubert Humphrey from Minnesota in 1970 - were actually elected to the Senate by the people of their state.

So the vice-presidency appears to be a dead-end job, at least if one's chief has the ill manners to survive. It appears to be a job that requires no particularly great past record and leads to no great political future.

So what have some of the occupants thought of it? John Garner advised Lyndon Johnson not to accept the post and said "The vice-presidency is worth no more than a bucket of warm spit." John Marshall, who served two terms under Woodrow Wilson, said "The vice-president is like a man in a cataleptic state; he cannot speak; he cannot move; he suffers no pain, and yet he is perfectly aware of everything going on about him."

When the constitution was drawn there was little interest in the idea of having a vice-president. It was argued that the office was unnecessary, and little time or thought was wasted on

the possible problems. The only real duty imposed by the Constitution is to preside over the Senate, and to cast a vote in the case of a tie. Most vice-presidents regard the first duty very lightly and are more often than not absent from the Senate during debates. The other duty - casting a tie-breaking vote - is seldom exercised. It has been argued that the vice-president could be a sort of executive officer, performing many of the more ceremonial functions, or taking over certain designated responsibilities. He could, for instance, greet the delegates to the DAR convention, make many of the routine speeches of the president, greet foreign dignitaries, or cut ribbons on a new superhighway. He could oversee certain administrative departments. Many presidents, on first assuming office, have said they intended to do just this. They never have. In many cases, of course, the law specifies that the President must act - but laws could be changed. The fact simply is that all presidents want to be in the public eye, they want to be seen performing these functions, they enjoy the attention, and they are completely convinced that nobody else can do any of these things as well as they can.

For the good of the country, a vice-president should be informed about the operations of the government, should be ready to assume the full responsibility. Consider the nine men who have stepped into the job with absolutely no training, no experience and no knowledge of current or anticipated situations.

None of this was considered by the founding fathers. They simply provided a vice-president, and gave him little to do.

There have been only two changes in the procedure since the Constitution was first written. The first came on the heels of the near-disaster with Aaron Burr. Prior to that time the man who came in second in the election for President was automatically named the vice-president. That was changed to provide for a separate election for the two offices. Then in 1967 it was finally seen that there should be a vice-president at all times. There had been too many times when long periods went by without one, so it was provided that if the office became vacant, the president should appoint a vice-president, subject to the confirmation of Congress.

Granted that the vice-presidency is a dead-end job and that the duties are practically non-existent, and that it does not necessarily attract first-rate men, how has it worked out?

The first vice-president to succeed to the higher office was John Tyler - known at the time as "Tippecanoe and WHO?" His nomination in 1840, to run with William Harrison, was quite controversial, but nobody cared too much, for no one really expected him to become President - no vice-president ever had. But within a few months he did. His term as president was also controversial, and he became the only president ever to be read out of his party while still in office.

Tyler was a mediocre lawyer, honest, a man of polished manners, and a genius for getting elected to offices which he had not the slightest genius for discharging capably. At the time

of his accession, there was much question as to whether Tyler became "Acting President", or actually the President, and whether he should get the salary of the President. Tyler had no doubts, and he became known as President, moved into the White House immediately, drew the full salary, and was to all intents and purposes the real President. That much at least he did accomplish - but little else. So the rights of succession were firmly established. His last official act as President, and probably the only one for which he is known, was the admission into the Union of Texas as a slave state.

After only one intervening President, Zachary Taylor died in office in 1850, and his vice-president, Millard Fillmore, became President. Horace Greeley said of Zachary Taylor that he was a "journeyman throat cutter", and his opponent, Lewis Cass, was described/^{as}"The country doesn't deserve to have as President that pot-bellied, mutton-headed cucumber". Fillmore was not much better. He was neither brilliant nor forceful, and was selected only because he would not overshadow the well-meaning but totally inadequate Zachary Taylor. As one historian put it, within ten years the country suffered four presidents it never should have had - Harrison, Tyler, Taylor and Fillmore.

It was then that the country went through a period of almost seven years without a vice-president. From the death of Zachary Taylor in 1850 until ^{James} John Buchanan took office in 1857, there was a vice-president for only one month, since William King, elected as vice-president under Franklin Pierce, died after only

one month in office, never even having been to Washington. Even in those difficult times just before the Civil War when feelings ran particularly high, the office was not thought important, and the country could get along well without it.

And then there was Andrew Johnson. Lincoln's first vice-president, Hannibal Hamlin, was dumped in 1864 in favor of the democrat Johnson. Johnson had always been a democrat, and had no intention of changing. He had been elevated from the governorship of Tennessee to the Senate in 1860, where he constantly and passionately defended the Union and supported the policies of Lincoln. Lincoln appointed him military governor of Tennessee in 1862, where again he strongly supported the Union. So Lincoln recommended him for the vice-presidency in 1864, with little opposition.

Whether he was completely drunk or seriously ill at his inauguration was much debated - one's opinion being determined largely by party affiliation. At any rate, the one month he served as vice-president was spent largely in isolation in an attempt to overcome the disgrace and disaster of the inauguration.

Johnson, like Lincoln, was born into poverty, was self-educated, and rose to prominence entirely by his own efforts. He was apprenticed to a tailor at the age of fourteen, ran away, and at the age of nineteen, set himself up as a tailor in a small town in Tennessee. With the help of his young wife he learned to read and write. His industry and unflagging stamina brought him prosperity (including eight slaves) and some degree of local fame.

He was a man around whom controversy always surged, which he even seemed to foster himself.

Now he was suddenly trying to bind up the wounds of war. He was faced with a hostile congress, controlled largely by men who were determined to dominate the management of the reconstruction program. The policies, as well as the man, were the source of constant battles with Congress. His conciliatory post-war program, the program envisioned by Lincoln, had little public support. Whether Lincoln himself would have fared much better with this hostile Congress is debatable. The enemies were well organized, aggressive, politically astute, unscrupulous, and determined to destroy him and his policies. Johnson himself was also outspoken, with strong convictions and the courage to fight for them.

The final battle with Congress was set off by the passage in Congress of the Tenure of Office Act and the Reconstruction Act. Johnson vetoed both, and they were immediately passed over his veto. The Tenure of Office Act would prohibit the President from dismissing any cabinet officer or other official appointed with the consent of the Senate. Johnson dismissed Secretary of War Stanton, who refused to vacate his office.

In February, 1868, The House voted to impeach Johnson for "high crimes and misdemeanors in office", and The Senate proceeded with the trial. This was a lynching bee, of course, led by Thaddeus Stevens, politically potent as ever at the age of 75. He said to a younger colleague in the Republican party that he should "tell his conscience to go to the devil, and follow the party line."

When the issue finally came to a vote in May, every member of the Senate was present, even the Senator from Iowa who had suffered a severe paralytic stroke a few days earlier. But seven Republicans refused to follow Stevens, and Johnson was acquitted by a one-vote margin. Immediately, Stanton resigned, and Johnson had won a victory over the Tenure of Office Act, which was not declared unconstitutional until 1926.

Even though Johnson was acquitted and completed his term in office, not one of the seven Republicans voting to uphold Johnson was ever elected to public office again. One, Senator Ross from Kansas, was so hated and reviled in his home state that he had to move away.

This whole sorry tale was brought to a different conclusion when Johnson returned to the Senate in 1874. One of the Senators who had been most prominent in condemning him walked up to him, greeted him and shook his hand warmly when he returned to that body.

In spite of the tremendous furor at the time, and the unpopularity in many circles of his reconstruction policies, historians have later rated Johnson as a fairly good, about average, President.

James Garfield was the next president to have the ill manners to die in office, less than a year after being inaugurated. Chester A. Arthur succeeded him, and became a far better president than any of his friends or enemies expected. He was originally

the man who handed out the patronage and supervised most appointments, so it was particularly surprising that he organized the Civil Service Commission. He also modernized the Navy - and reduced postage rates to two cents. Arthur, too, is given fairly good marks by historians - not outstanding, but about average.

Perhaps the most controversial vice-president was the next one to become an accidental president. He was the first one with any real personality - what the modern Kennedy's would call charisma. Theodore Roosevelt was also the best example of a man being nominated for the vice-presidency to get rid of a troublemaker. Teddy was probably responsible, almost single-handedly, for blowing up the Maine and starting the Spanish-American War. Certainly it was the cause of his sudden popularity, and resulted in his election as governor of New York. He was immensely popular with the people of New York, even though he quickly earned the enmity of Thomas Platt, the political boss. Roosevelt took far too seriously the campaign pledge of reform, particularly as it applied to large corporations. Platt had every intention of keeping the friendship of those corporations, so he had to find a way to get rid of Roosevelt. Henry Cabot Lodge, Senator from Massachusetts, had meanwhile been urging Roosevelt to run for the vice-presidency. This gave Platt his chance, so he began to boost Roosevelt for that job. As Platt told his friend Matthew Quay, boss in Pennsylvania, the only way to get rid of Roosevelt was to kick him upstairs, and Quay agreed. But Mark Hanna, the king-maker from Ohio, was bitterly opposed, so he tried to get McKinley

to express a choice for some other candidate. McKinley would not. Meanwhile, there was a groundswell running for Roosevelt, who was also nominated on the first ballot.

Only six months into McKinley's second term, in September 1901, McKinley was shot, and the man who was kicked upstairs suddenly went all the way upstairs. When Mark Hanna heard the news, he said "Now look, that damned cowboy is President!" The fox who had been pushed out of New York was pushed directly into the hen house. The carefully conceived plot to bury Roosevelt in a dead-end position had backfired.

Theodore Roosevelt is too well-known to need any delineation of his career as President. It need be said only that he became one of our greater presidents, ranking right up there with Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, Wilson and Jackson - and a cousin who later also became governor of New York and President. Thus for the first time in our history the system produced as it was intended, and a capable man assumed office.

Next time, the country was not as fortunate. The Republican convention of 1920 was really one of the better examples of the "smoke-filled room." There was no outstanding front-runner for the presidential nomination. Three well-known and capable men were virtually tied for the lead - Leonard Wood, Governor Frank Lowden of Illinois, and Senator Hiram Johnson from California. So, a group of party leaders, most of them senators, met late one evening to settle the matter. Since none of the front-runners could control the situation, the party bosses settled the matter

by nominating Senator Warren Harding of Ohio, who was little-known, but had no important enemies. A more disastrous choice than the easy-going, inadequate senator could hardly have been made. But the bosses didn't really care - they were practically assured of victory anyway. William Allen White, the distinguished editor and biographer, said "If you nominate Harding, you will disgrace the Republican Party. You will bring shame to the country." Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the outspoken daughter of Teddy Roosevelt, spoke what was on all minds. She said "Harding could be counted on to 'go along'. In other words, he could be controlled."

The steam roller was working, so far. For vice-president, the backroom boys had chosen another senator, Irvine Lenroot from Wisconsin. Most of the delegates had left the hall when the vice-presidential nomination came before the House. Suddenly, for what reason nobody knew, an unknown delegate was given the floor, and he nominated Calvin Coolidge, Governor of Massachusetts. A singularly dull convention suddenly came to life and saw a chance for some enthusiasm. After much shouting and only one ballot, Coolidge got the nomination. For once, the rank and file had its say - and did no better than the party bosses.

The election in 1920 was a landslide, as expected, and the country was ready to return to normalcy with Harding and Coolidge. This Calvin Coolidge had held a variety of minor offices in Massachusetts, finally becoming governor. His administration as governor was, at best, ordinary. But then the Boston police decided to strike. Boston was overrun by rioters and looters for two days,

and the city was helpless. Then Coolidge sent in the state militia, and the strike was broken. That brought Coolidge instant and nationwide fame. To this day it is about the only thing one can remember that he did.

Under Harding the scandals began to mount. Teapot Dome and other equally unsavory deals began to come to light. Coolidge apparently paid little attention - and nor did Harding.

In 1923 Harding suddenly died, and Silent Cal was President. He even resisted firing Attorney General Daugherty, who was in the thick of the worst scandals. He finally couldn't resist the pressure and did get rid of Daugherty, and by so doing cut the ties with Harding's Ohio Gang.

It was said that when he opened his mouth, moths flew out. The story is also told of a woman who was sitting next to him at dinner said to him - "I made a bet I could get you to say three words." His reply - "you lose."

Coolidge had really done very close to nothing. Yet he was renominated in 1924, and again the Republicans scored a great victory. For the next four years he continued to do nothing. These, of course, were the years of great prosperity, the ever-expanding bubble of "Coolidge Prosperity". True, there was the Kellogg-Briand Pact to outlaw war, Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, coast-to-coast air mail was established, the motion pictures began to talk, and the United States, which had for so long been a debtor nation became the world's creditor. All the allies of the

first World War owed us money, and Coolidge was determined to make them pay. At the same time he raised the tariff to make it impossible for them to earn the money to do so by selling their goods here. Coolidge commented, "They hired the money, didn't they?"

Coolidge certainly could not have foreseen the troubles that would enmesh the country after 1928, but for whatever reason, he astonished the country, and embarrassed the Republican leaders, by announcing, early in 1928, "I do not choose to run for President in 1928." Getting out before the bubble burst was just sheer Coolidge luck. The panic of 1929, the collapse of the economy and the ensuing depression were pure surprise to Calvin Coolidge.

Of thirty-seven men who occupied the presidency between 1793 and 1960, Coolidge is rated by the historians as twenty-seventh. But certainly Warren Harding was no better - he is considered a flat failure. So perhaps the country was no worse off.

Franklin Roosevelt had three vice-presidents. The first one, John Garner, broke with the president on the issue of packing the Supreme Court, and later cut off all connections when Roosevelt announced he would accept a "spontaneous draft" for a third term. Garner was disgusted with this "draft", and the famous voice from the sewers. The second vice-president, in the third term, was Henry Wallace, whom we were spared.

The vice-president in the fourth term, of course, was Harry Truman. There were many candidates in the running at the 1944

convention and the democratic party was much divided. Harry Truman was probably one of the least known and least important. He had made an excellent reputation in the Senate. There was little enthusiasm in his favor, but at least there was no outward antagonism, and he was the only one who didn't have some important segment of the party against him. It was widely recognized that Roosevelt had already served three terms, had lost much of his physical strength, was a tired and probably a sick man, and that the chances of his completing a fourth term were not good. But there was no doubt that he would be nominated and doubtless elected.

Truman was nominated by the convention, and an uninspiring rather ordinary man from Missouri had won the most consequential nomination of the century. Truman had been a protege of the infamous Tom Pendergast, who ran the party in Kansas City and the State of Missouri. He was given, by Pendergast, a series of small-time jobs in Missouri, and finally, like Teddy Roosevelt, had been kicked upstairs to the U.S. Senate by Pendergast just to get rid of him. Even though he owed his political success to Pendergast, there was no question in the minds of the voters, or of Pendergast, that Truman was independent.

Then on April 12, 1945, the haberdasher from Kansas City became President. He did not look like a President, and he did not act like one. Roosevelt had told him nothing, gave him no briefings, and had not in any way taken him into his confidence. It is absolutely incredible that in view of his rapidly failing health, which was obvious to most people even if he himself did not care

to admit it, that Roosevelt gave Truman no crash course in the problems that would face him.

But Harry Truman had a combination of qualities going for him. He had toughness, integrity, shrewdness, the willingness to work hard, study issues, and accept responsibility. He made the tough decisions and stuck with them. Under him, America won the World War, saw the beginning of the Cold War, the establishment of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the start of the policy of containing the Soviet Union. Also, of course, there was the Korean War, and his famous brush with General MacArthur.

After filling out the remainder of Roosevelt's fourth term, Truman was elected on his own in 1948. Theodore Roosevelt and Harry Truman - along with Lyndon Johnson - were the only presidents to be elected on their own after having served as accidental presidents. Theodore Roosevelt and Harry Truman are rated by historians as "near great" - an honor which it is doubtful Lyndon Johnson will share.

In 1960 Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy, both Senators, had their eye on the presidency. Kennedy wanted it because he had always thought he should have it. Johnson had somewhat different motives. He wanted it because he saw that his influence in the senate was perhaps beginning to wane. A new breed of young liberals - like Kennedy - had come to the senate, and Johnson's leadership might be threatened. So he started looking to the future. He could not, of course, seriously consider the possibility that he

might be ousted as Senate Majority Leader, so he looked at other possibilities, and naturally the presidency was the solution. But he reckoned without John F. Kennedy. Kennedy entered every primary, won most of them, and Johnson was simply left at the post. But he did make himself sufficiently well-known to be a strong candidate, and the leader for the second spot. He had previously said he didn't want it - but that of course is standard for any man running for the top spot. Johnson also saw the problems facing him if he stayed where he was. He was at this point only 52 years old, and was willing to take the "long views" and wait for 1968.

Here again, the vice-president was not chosen for his eminent suitability, but primarily because Kennedy needed a southern liberal on the ticket, a man who might help counter the anti-catholic vote which Kennedy feared, and a man who could help in the crucial Bible Belt South. Not mentioned or considered was the chance that this man might become President.

As usual, Kennedy at first treated Johnson with some respect, gave him a number of chores, sent him all over the world as an unofficial ambassador, asked him to sit at cabinet meetings, and had him shepherd administration bills at the Capitol. But Johnson did not fit the Kennedy mold. At 52 he was too old for the Kennedy idea of government by the young, and he certainly didn't fit with the Irish mafia surrounding Kennedy. Johnson was soon shut out of all major decisions, and watched the younger Kennedy, Robert, assume the position of number two man in the administration.

In November 1963, this politician, the sponsor and friend of Bobby Baker, became President. But he shortly appeared to be a changed man - apparently a case of the office making the man. He pushed through Congress many of the social programs Kennedy had been unable to get passed. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was largely his doing. Whatever people might think of him later, in early 1964 he was clearly the man of the hour in democratic circles, and his nomination and probably election in 1964 was taken for granted.

But Johnson as president will be remembered primarily for the Vietnam War and the deep divisions it caused in the country, plus the burning cities and civil disobedience resulting in large part from it. Vietnam was the longest, costliest and most divisive war in our history, with the least results, and the only one we could have been said to have lost. Although Johnson made constant efforts to prove it was actually started by Kennedy, or perhaps even by Eisenhower, it was regarded as his war. His social reforms and new governmental programs to establish the War on Poverty and the Great Society gained him popularity in many circles. Largely, they were the same old programs originally started in the Roosevelt years, and constantly expanded, with vastly greater amounts of money spent on them. But even these could not overcome his close connection with the Vietnam War and the feeling that much of the blame for it lay on his shoulders.

So, in 1968, Johnson found it necessary to say that he would not be a candidate for re-election. The historians are thus

spared the necessity of passing judgment on his presidency. He did it for himself by acknowledging that his record was not such as would persuade the electorate to return him to office. This was the third time in history that a sitting president, legally eligible for renomination, chose not to run. Calvin Coolidge said it in 1928, Harry Truman in 1952, and Johnson in 1968. All of them came into office through the death of a predecessor.

If a writer of novels were to concoct a plot containing the elements of how the next man to accede to the presidency accidentally got there, he would be drummed out of the profession. Gerald Ford at no time had any plans or schemes to run for either president or vice-president. He was perfectly happy as a Representative in Congress. Any plans that he might have had for the future certainly did not include anything beyond, perhaps, the Speakership.

When Spiro Agnew resigned the vice-presidency in September, 1973, the 25th Amendment to the Constitution was first called into play. A man more eligible for resignation than vice-president Agnew cannot be imagined. He was just a small-time influence-peddler who even accepted bribes while he was in the vice-president's office in the Capitol. His departure was long overdue - in fact, he should never have arrived.

Thereupon President Nixon had to appoint a successor. So a President who was himself under extreme pressure to resign, and who would very likely otherwise be impeached and convicted, would

appoint his successor. The far-seeing framers of the Constitution would certainly never have thought of this possibility, nor, in fact, would the men who drafted the 25th Amendment.

Yet who could imagine the joy with which the nomination of Gerald Ford was greeted? Gerald Ford, the fortieth vice-president, was an uninspiring congressman, was by his own admission only a fair student, and in the eyes of many of his colleagues "not real bright". Lyndon Johnson had said that Gerald Ford had played football too long without his helmet. He had been in Congress 25 years, became House Minority Leader by hard work and party loyalty. One of his backers said he got the job because "He had the All-American image and nobody was mad at him." He continued to build up an army of Republican congressmen who owed him a favor, for he was assiduous in campaigning for them, travelled thousands of miles, and helped collect campaign treasuries for them. His only political missteps concerned the Supreme Court, where he fought valiantly for the confirmation of two Nixon appointees, both poorly qualified. Then he sought to have Justice Douglas impeached, also unsuccessfully. It was at that time that a former professor of Ford's at the Yale Law School spoke of the "blatant and patent dishonesty of my old student and one-time friend Representative Gerald Ford."

Strange as it may seem, this man shortly became President. He had no charisma, no flamboyance, no demonstrated ability. A Ford administration would not be exciting, but it would be stable. Perhaps after the trauma of the Vietnam War and the Nixon affair

stability was not such a bad idea, and for that reason alone, Ford might be what the country needed. A sort of "return to normalcy".

For the first time in history a man came to the presidency through the resignation of his predecessor, and by a method other than election.

As Ford said when he was inaugurated as vice-president - "I am a Ford, not a Lincoln". By no man's measure was he a great president, nor was he near-great, and very possibly not even average, but neither was he a failure. Even though he served as President for two years, he achieved renomination without any great enthusiasm, and was defeated by a man nobody knew.

The difficulty with the American vice-presidency lies both with the office, and with the manner of selecting the occupant. Few really able and ambitious men will accept, to say nothing of seek, an office which commands so little respect and which carries no responsibilities. It is seen purely as a way of furthering the election of the president. The vice-president is chosen for geographical reasons; to balance the ticket by providing, in some instances, a conservative to balance a liberal or vice-versa; to get rid of a difficult upstart; to pay off political debts; or for other reasons not at all related to the ability of the candidate to fill the higher office.

How, then, can the problem be solved? For too large a proportion of our history the vice-president has become the president.

Nine times the vice-president has moved up - one-fifth of our presidents got the job by being vice-president. This seems far too large a proportion to leave the succession to the kind of chance and lack of attention that it now gets. The problems facing this country and the world in the future are potentially too serious.

The authors of the Constitution wrestled with this problem, and came up with an answer that was soon proved unsatisfactory - we almost got Aaron Burr. Neither does the two-party system give the solution - it merely insures that the man selected is second-^{to} best. Perhaps one solution might be/provide that the man who comes in second in the party convention selecting the president shall be nominated as vice-president. Yet the Constitution makes no mention of parties or party conventions.

Perhaps there is no good solution, and we will have to muddle along as we have. After all, not all of the vice-presidents have been failures - perhaps the ratio of success among presidents who came into office through death or resignation has been no worse than among those who were elected to the office.

John Adams, the first vice-president, said, "I am Vice-President. In this I am nothing, but I may be everything."