

Today I would like to talk about the Vice Presidency, probably the most maligned public office ever created.

In June of 1976, when it was apparent that Governor Carter was going to win the Democratic nomination for President, I flew down to Plains, Georgia, so that he could interview me, as he had several others, in his search for a running mate. I believe he wanted to make sure that the one who shared his ticket was compatible with him, and was the sort of person capable of assuming the Presidency, should that become necessary.

After talking with Hubert, and others, about the Vice Presidency, I was interested in the position, but I also had several concerns. I knew of the dismal history of the Vice Presidency, and I was determined that if I decided to take the job I would not be another of its victims. I liked the Senate, I was proud of my achievements there and as I told then Governor Carter, I would not trade them for a ceremonial office. I would only be interested in the office if it could become a useful instrument of government.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

The problem with the Vice Presidency

has been that those who framed the Constitution prescribed no important duties or powers to the Office of the Vice President. They did not even consider creating the office until two weeks before the Constitutional Convention adjourned. And then, the principal duty they framed for the Vice President was to preside over the Senate and break tie votes.

o Since then, whenever a Vice President has tried to do more than preside -- and tried to exert control over the Senate -- he has been sternly rebuffed, as my immediate predecessor once found out.-- The Congress is jealous of its prerogatives. No matter how much influence a Vice President may once have wielded in Congress -- Garner had been Speaker of the House, Johnson Majority Leader of the Senate -- as Vice President, he had little to say in the affairs of Congress. And as to tie votes, they come up on an average of less than one a year.

o Barred from a meaningful role in the Senate, Vice Presidents have been altogether barred from the Executive Branch until very recently. -- For until recently, everyone thought it a violation of the separation of powers for the President of the Senate to perform Executive duties. As Thomas Jefferson said when he was Vice President:

"As to participating in the administration, if by that (Mr. Adams) meant the Executive Cabinet, both duty and inclination will shut that door to me. As to duty, the Constitution will know me only as the member of a Legislative body."

o Others agreed -- so emphatically that from the day John Adams attended his only Cabinet meeting, to the time when Thomas Marshall attended Cabinet meetings in President Wilson's absence, no Cabinet meeting included the Vice President. -- So entrenched was this legislative bias that Harry Truman said a Vice President was "not an officer of the Executive Branch." And Dwight Eisenhower, as recently as 17 years ago, said that the Vice President "is not legally a part of the Executive Branch and is not subject to direction by the President."

o Startling as it may seem -- and with only a few exceptions -- Vice Presidents did not work with their Presidents. Until 20 years ago, the Vice President did not have an office anywhere near the White House. From Adams to Lyndon Johnson, they worked out of an office on Capitol Hill.

o With so little to do, a Vice President has been important through the years only because, as President Wilson put it, "he may cease to be Vice President." -- Or, as Vice President Marshall put it, "The only business of the Vice President is to ring the White House bell every morning and ask what is the state of the health of the President." Such a business cannot be pleasing to a President. No person likes to be reminded every day of his own mortality. And so paradoxically the sole important function of Vice President through history has been a principal source of strain between them and their Presidents.

o There have been other strains. When I talked to Vice President Rockefeller before he left office, he said that conflicts between his staff and the President's staff plagued his relations with President Ford. -- A President may also fear that his Vice President is a rising star, threatening to eclipse his own importance. He may also fear that his Vice President, with time on his hands, will form political allegiances against him -- as Calhoun, Dawes, and other Vice Presidents have done.

o In recent years, the lot of Vice Presidents had improved somewhat. John Nance Garner was the first Vice President to undertake foreign travel in behalf of the President. His successor, Henry Wallace, took on special and important assignments. As the head of the Board of Economic Warfare, he has responsibility for directing crucial segments of our economy during World War II. Others have assumed the job of principal spokesman and defender for Administration policies.

o But each of these advances has led to new pitfalls. Foreign travel, as George Bush has said, can amount to a string of funerals. Special assignments, as Henry Wallace found out, can embroil a Vice President in nasty and tedious bureaucratic fights, if the assignment conflicts with the work of an Executive Department. And if it poses no such conflict, it will likely be an assignment, as Thomas Marshall said, "in which you can do the least harm." Finally, to do nothing but defend Administration policy in a partisan way demeans not only the Office of Vice President, in my opinion, but the person who holds it.

#### A WASTED OFFICE

Thus for nearly all of its 192 years, the occupants of that office had wasted their time. John Adams called the Vice Presidency "the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived" -- so insignificant to Daniel Webster that he turned down the Vice Presidential nomination in 1848. "I do not propose," he said, "to be buried until I am dead."

But far more serious than this continued waste of Vice Presidents' time is the continued waste of the office. For I believe the Vice Presidency is a marvelous resource, possessing qualities that no other office in the government possesses. It is true that it has few duties -- and yet it is the second highest office in the land. It has no power or patronage -- and yet it is the only other office, besides the Presidency, on which all the American people vote. It occupies no important position in either the Legislative or Executive Branch -- and yet it is the only office in the government with connections to both. It is a unique and flexible office at the highest level of our government. And because of that it has great opportunities.

Moreover, the new sense of frailty of Presidents:

- FDR's Death in office
- the attempted assassination of Truman
- Eisenhower's heart attack while in office
- the assassination of John Kennedy
- the movement to impeach Nixon
- the assassination attempts on Ford
- and now, the attempted assassination of Reagan

has focused unprecedented attention on the Vice Presidency. As a result the Vice Presidency has returned to somewhat the status it enjoyed in the early Republic, a stepping stone to the Presidency.

In the 160 years before 1948 only five Vice Presidents had ever won election to the Presidency on their own. By comparison, of the eight Presidents to serve in office since 1948 -- four were former Vice Presidents, and every man who has served as Vice President since 1953 has become a candidate for President, with the exception of Agnew, who the law caught up with, and Ford, who was transformed from a little known Congressman into a national favorite in a few weeks.

#### THE MONDALE VICE PRESIDENCY

Right after the election in 1976, I sent a memo to then President-elect Carter, outlining what I believed to be the most effective role I could play as Vice President.

Understanding of course that

Note: the primary role of the Vice President -- to succeed the President upon his death or incapacitation was made clear by the major Constitutional development of the modern Vice Presidency -- the 25th Amendment which became a part of the Constitution in 1967. This amendment clarified any doubts about the Vice President's becoming President upon the death of the President, greatly reduced questions about temporary succession to the Presidency and also provided for the first time for the filling of a vacancy in the office of the Vice President.

The basic role of the Vice President, I wrote, was to be a general advisor to the President. As I said then and I still believe today, being the only other public official elected nationwide, not affected by the specific obligations or institutional interests of either the Congress or the executive branch, and being able to look at the Government as a whole, put me in a unique position to advise the President.

For the next four years we proceeded to move the Vice Presidency into the modern political and policy making world. I had:

- access to classified intelligence material, including the same materials the President saw each day
- access to all the papers flowing to the President each day
- a special relationship with members of the Cabinet which required them to respond to requests for information
- participated in all key policy groups
- developed an independent staff
- enjoyed a close working relationship with the White House staff
- and most importantly, access to the President whenever necessary.

It is important to point out that the relationship the President and I developed was more than just personal, however, in the final analysis everything depended on that initial relationship of trust and confidence. President Carter had once told me that he felt previous Presidents had been insecure, afraid of the competition a Vice President might pose and afraid of their own mortality, of which Vice Presidents serve as a daily reminder. By contrast Carter was sure of himself and he was sure of his constitutional powers. Rather than fearing the Vice President he wanted an active, useful and helpful Vice President -- and one who would be ready at a moment's notice to take the President's place.

While there is nothing statutory or Constitutional to prevent a future President from undoing the changes we made -- there is everything in this new tradition, and the public support for it, to make him think twice. From all the press accounts I have read and discussions with new Administration officials I believe the new President and Vice President are showing every sign of continuing this new tradition, and further strengthening the role of the Vice President.

SUGGESTIONS TO CHANGE THE VICE PRESIDENCY

I believe the Vice Presidency, especially in its modern form, is a useful office which should no longer be judged by its dismal past. If one assumes that it is a useful office can it then be made more useful?

A number of ways have been suggested to enlarge the role of the Vice President to be of more assistance to the President, and to share the burdens of that office. It has been suggested that the Vice President serve as White House Chief of Staff, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Congressional Liaison Cabinet member and coordinator of Cabinet affairs, Party leader, Surrogate head of State, or even serve as a co-President.

While all of these suggestions are interesting, I believe that any change in the Vice Presidency which would weaken, diminish, dilute or divide the office of the Presidency would be a grave mistake. To say that increased problems a President faces requires a new division of labor in the White House is to get it exactly the wrong way around. The more a President must do, the stronger the office must be. And the purpose of the Vice President is to add to the President's strength, not sap it.

Recent Vice President's have agreed that the office is frustrating, but potentially a useful "right arm" for the President relieving him of



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some of his immense burden. Nelson Rockefeller said, "if the Vice President is a person of ability, stature, and loyalty, there are really unlimited possibilities as to the role he can play in assisting the President."

While most Vice Presidents have admitted they were frustrated in their positions, I think it is fair to say that a Vice President need not be frustrated if he simply accepts, prior to taking office, that he is assuming a standby position and that whatever useful purpose he may have will be as a loyal assistant to the President -- without any executive power or authority in his own name. It would be dangerous to make it otherwise. I say this because under the Constitution, the powers of the Executive departments are concentrated in the hands of one man -- the elected President of the United States, who is also the political leader of his party. If a new center of authority and power, separate from that of the President, were established in the executive branch under the leadership of an elected Vice President, who might at any time become President, this would immediately create the temptation of giving an ambitious Vice President a platform with separate authority.

My Vice Presidency has been described by several historians and writers as "the most powerful in recent history." However, such qualitative judgments are subject to presidential fancy and ever shifting political tides. While I was a member of the Carter inner circle of advisors, with access to information and people, the boundaries of my authority rest solely on my personal relationship -- a relationship of trust and confidence -- with the President.



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This dependency upon the President cannot be gotten around by constitutional amendments or by laws. In short, to be a vital and integral part of the Administration a Vice President must be needed and wanted by the President.

As I have said before, I believe the force of evolution -- the resilient, adaptive energy of our political system -- is the most appropriate engine of change to continue to enhance the office of the Vice President. We can all think of entities we have today that were not mentioned in the original Constitution ... political parties, primary process, power of judicial determination, even presidential news conferences ... all of these have evolved along with the Nation.

So have the enormous range of responsibilities that fall on the President's shoulders. In our century, as the President's powers have grown, so has his responsibility for the prosperity of our economy, the stature of our country abroad, the health of democracy overseas and peace in the world. In recent years the American President has found himself the focus of our rising expectations and the target of our mounting demands.

Just as the demands on a President have risen, so President Carter and I thought the office of the Vice President could be used to a greater extent.

In remaking the Vice President's role into that of a close working senior advisor to the President, with a National perspective, across the spectrum of domestic and foreign affairs we established a new, highly useful and meaningful tradition. A tradition that is good for future Presidents, Vice Presidents, and most importantly the country.

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