

Action on Mr. Ford

The issue of the Presidential succession becomes more urgent as Mr. Nixon's authority diminishes daily in the face of even more unanswered questions about his conduct in office. The continuity of government is clearly the paramount concern as Congress considers the nomination of Representative Gerald Ford to the Vice-Presidency. Swift and single-minded attention to the filling of that glaring vacancy is inseparable from governmental stability.

The need for expeditious action does not in any way diminish Congressional responsibility to weigh Mr. Ford's personal record and his capacity to fill the office. To do less would be to deal lightly with the nation's future; but to do more—to let, for example, partisan considerations enter into the verdict—would be as great a threat to the orderly continuation of government.

It is true but irrelevant that Mr. Ford would not be the choice of those who voted for Mr. Nixon's opponent in 1972, nor of many Democrats who crossed party lines to give Mr. Nixon his historic plurality, nor of many thoughtful Republicans who are more interested in quality than in partisanship. Those who believe, as does this newspaper, that the President has by his extraordinary misuse of his powers destroyed his capacity to govern cannot, however, claim the right to choose his successor. The 25th Amendment gives the President that right, subject to the consent of Congress.

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The recent memory of the Agnew disaster obviously dictates scrupulous attention to questions of personal integrity. The complexity of the modern Presidency calls for concern over a candidate's past accomplishments and his potential for sound judgment.

The Nixon experience, however, also underscores the importance of qualities that give assurance of a return to an open Presidency obedient to the Constitution. The next Vice President therefore must be expected to understand the difference between executive privilege and executive arrogance. He must acknowledge that law and order must always be compatible with the Bill of Rights. He must willingly concede that "inherent" rights belong to the people, not the President. He must know that no man can faithfully execute the laws if he believes himself above the law.

Although we find many flaws of omission and commission in Mr. Ford's political record and exercise of leadership, it is ultimately on the basis of these fundamental questions, along with those of personal integrity, that Congress must rule on his fitness for the Presidential succession. Applying those criteria, free of partisanship, to the President's choice, Congress should move rapidly to pass on the Ford nomination. The state of the Presidency brooks no delay.