

The Ford Nomination: What Is Needed From Congress?

To the Editor:

There is inconsistency in having the Senate and the House carry out hearings for the confirmation of Representative Gerald R. Ford as Vice President.

The leader of the majority party in the House (the Speaker) and the leader of the minority party in the House (the Minority Leader) are chosen in identical manner. Each is elected to respective positions by the House members of their parties. The only scrutiny, if any, would be by their own members and out of public view. But for the fortunes of political numbers in the House, Representative Ford would be the Speaker.

According to Title 3 (the President) of the Act of June 25, 1948, the Speaker of the House is in direct line for the Presidency in the absence of a Vice President. There is no other formality in the succession of the Speaker to the Presidency other than his resignation from the House and in taking the constitutional oath or affirmation to the office of President without any Congressional participation as to hearings or confirmation.

On the supposition that Representative Ford would have been the Speaker of the House and with the President designating him to fill the vacancy in the office of Vice President, would it not then be the height of absurdity to put him through the process of hearings? As Speaker he would already be directly in line of succession.

Then why the hearings?

A. E. TOMKIN
Washington, Nov. 2, 1973

To the Editor:

May I respectfully dissent from your Oct. 29 editorial calling for speed in the matter of Congressional consideration of Representative Gerald Ford's nomination to the Vice-Presidency. There is neither logic nor justice behind the "twofold need" you cite.

First, there can be no question that, if the office of President is vacated, there will be a successor, since the Constitution provides for the Speaker of the House of Representatives to become President in that event. Hence, this is no reason for speed.

Second, there is no need to assure those who voted in the last national election that "in accordance with their balloting, a Republican will preside over the country until the electorate decides otherwise." For one thing, this argument ignores the evidence appearing in the Watergate investigation of massive fraud committed by the President and his closest advisers in connection with that election. If the electorate had known that the truth about the Watergate break-in and the illegal activities carried on by close advisers of the President, perhaps even with his knowledge, their choice for President obviously might have been



Charles Barsotti

different. In fact, according to recent Gallup polls McGovern would win the election if it were to be held today.

Further, those who voted in the last election did not vote for "a Republican"; they voted for Nixon and Agnew, and if neither of those men is available there is no reason to prefer a Republican over a Democrat as the successor to the President. Indeed, is it significant that, although Mr. Nixon won the Presidential election by a landslide, the Republican party failed to win a majority of the seats of the House of Representatives.

In view of the resignation of Agnew and the proceedings for the impeachment of President Nixon which are now under way in Congress, it would be irresponsible for the Congress to confirm the nomination of Ford until the question of President Nixon's competence has been determined. It would be far better, in fact, for a new election to be held to determine a successor to President Nixon, should he be impeached, than it would be for Congress to approve the nomination of Gerald Ford, who is not the choice of the people for President of the United States. Responsible spokesmen of the press should be calling for study of the question of whether and how a Presidential election can be held otherwise than every four years than for haste in the matter of the Ford nomination.

RICHARD R. HOWE
New York, Oct. 29, 1973

To the Editor:

I am puzzled by general acceptance of the proposition that because the country elected a Republican President in 1972 legitimate succession requires that a Republican succeed Richard Nixon in office. At least one public opinion survey concludes that if the election were rerun nearly as many voters would now prefer Senator

McGovern as actually voted for his successful opponent twelve months ago. It should be self-evident that either impeachment or coerced resignation would register a massive shift of political sentiment. One might sensibly argue that the same majority which in 1972 returned to office a Democratic Congress in 1973 prefers a Democratic chief executive as well. The possibility is the more plausible because Mr. Nixon ran conspicuously as an individual rather than a member of the Republican party. Since a bare quarter of the public retain their confidence in Mr. Nixon as an individual and the larger of the two major parties continues to be the Democratic party, I perceive little merit in the suggestion that Speaker Albert has a necessarily inferior claim on the highest office to that of Representative Ford.

ROBERT LEKACHMAN
Distinguished Professor
Lehman College
Bronx, Nov. 6, 1973

To the Editor:

Representative Ford's position on impeachment, that grounds for impeachment are what a majority of the Congress says they are, demonstrates either an amazing ignorance of what is generally accepted to be just or is representative of the crass political sophistry with which the present Administration attempts to govern.

If the former instance is true, important questions concerning Mr. Ford's intelligence and/or seriousness are raised. If the latter is true, Congress is in danger of institutionalizing the politics of Watergate Washington.

It cannot be a satisfactory condition for confirmation that Representative Ford, as a member of the Congressional establishment, is well known to his colleagues. Before he is confirmed, the electorate should, indeed must, be apprised of the potential Vice President's views and beliefs.

It is the singular advantage of the long and grueling Presidential campaigns that they give to the electorate a sense of the candidate's strengths, weaknesses and vision of America. They allow the electorate, over a period of time and increasing pressures, to experience the candidate.

Therefore, seriousness of purpose requires extensive public hearings on Mr. Ford's nomination. Extensive because the people can best be served, in the regrettable event of Mr. Ford's accession to the Presidency, by knowing their potential head of state. Understanding breeds confidence. Public because the necessary bond between President and people can best be served by open covenants openly arrived at.

GARY D. PALMER
New York, Nov. 1, 1973

An editorial on this subject appears today.