

Making of the Vice President:

By Lawrence Meyer

Washington Post Staff Writer

John Adams, the first of the 39 men who have held the job, neatly summed up the situation almost 190 years ago. "I am Vice President," Adams said. "In this, I am nothing. But I may be everything."

Adams, who later became President in his own right, chafed under the restraints of the vice presidency, complaining, "My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived."

Yet eight times in American history the potential importance of the vice presidency foreseen by Adams has been realized. John Tyler was the first Vice President to become President after William Henry Harrison died in 1841. Four times in the last 72 years, a Vice President has become, in Adams' phrase, "everything," succeeding a President who died in office.

For all the potential importance of the office, several presidential candidates have chosen their running mates with little apparent caution and on some occasions for dubious reasons.

Consider the case of the Democratic Party in 1904. It chose an 81-year-old industrialist, Henry Gassaway Davis, as the running mate for its presidential candidate, Alton B. Parker. The Democrats apparently hoped that Davis would share some of his wealth with the party, which badly needed it. But, remarked one politician of the time, "like most men who made their money," Davis "knew how to keep it."

Franklin D. Roosevelt chose House Speaker John Nance Garner in 1932 as his vice-presidential running mate in order to get delegate votes pledged to Garner and thus break a deadlocked Democratic convention.

Roosevelt chose Henry Wallace for Vice President in 1940 despite the firm opposition of important ele-

ments of the party. The choice was so controversial that Wallace carried only 627 of 1,100 convention votes. Roosevelt reportedly wanted his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, on the ticket, but when Hull repeatedly refused, Wallace was picked. Roosevelt told his Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, that Wallace "might strengthen it (the ticket) politically, and one has to think of it, he would be a good man if something happened to the President."

In 1944, according to Bronx political boss Ed Flynn, Roosevelt surveyed the field and settled on Sen. Harry S. Truman of Missouri, who "just dropped into the slot. It was agreed that Truman was the man who would hurt him the least."

By his own account, Truman was unprepared for the presidency, ignorant when he assumed the office of crucial developments—including American possession of the atom bomb—that affected the war effort.

The reasons for John F. Kennedy's selection of Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson as the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1960 are in dispute—some insiders contending that Johnson was never really meant to have the second spot by President Kennedy, others maintaining that Kennedy considered Johnson the most qualified man for the presidency next to himself and still others saying that Kennedy recognized that, without Johnson on the ticket, the Democrats could not win the election.

In 1964, according to the account of Theodore White in "The Making of the President—1964," President Johnson spent months considering his choice of a running mate, finally settling on Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. Humphrey, according to White's account, was a happy combination of two important criteria of Johnson's—he was qualified for the presidency and he was a political asset rather than a liability.

Sen. Barry Goldwater, the

A Process Without Rules

1964 Republican presidential candidate, by way of contrast selected Rep. William E. Miller of New York as his running mate. One of Goldwater's reasons, reported at the time, was that he chose Miller "because he drives Lyndon Johnson nuts."

One of the obvious pitfalls in selecting a vice presidential candidate—made painfully obvious by events over the last 15 months—is how a hastily made choice of a running mate can come back to haunt the presidential nominee.

The Eagleton affair—as Sen. George McGovern's choice of Sen. Thomas Eagleton has come to be known—is one example of "sloppy staff work," according to one of McGovern's Democratic colleagues in the Senate.

By virtually all informed accounts, President Nixon originally chose Spiro T. Agnew as his running mate in 1968 because Agnew was not opposed by any major faction of the Republican Party.

Closer examination of Ea-

gleton might have brought forward evidence of his history of mental treatment that ultimately drove him from the Democratic ticket. And by the same token, closer scrutiny of Agnew might have revealed the financial dealings that forced him to resign the vice presidency Wednesday.

Ted Van Dyk, who served both Humphrey and McGovern as an aide while they were choosing their vice presidential running mates, said that a presidential nominee is limited in the amount of checking he can do before making his selection.

A presidential candidate customarily makes informal inquiries with people in his prospective running mate's home state to find out if the prospect has any skeletons in his closet, Van Dyk said, but the presidential nominee cannot check too closely for fear of offending the person being considered.

One assumes, Van Dyk added, that anyone in public life for a period of time will have had any questionable

or illegal activity revealed and that the person under consideration will tell the presidential nominee of any potential problems. "In the end," Van Dyk said, "all you can really count on is the good faith of the possible vice presidential nominee."

In neither Eagleton's case nor Agnew's, so far as the public record reflects the facts, did either man inform the presidential nominee of problems in his past.

Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), author of the constitutional amendment under which President Nixon nominated Agnew's successor, said yesterday that he sees general "improvement" in the way presidential candidates select their running mates — the trend moving away from ticket-balancing on a geographic and political basis, Bayh said, to consideration of the candidate's qualifications and agreement with the presidential nominee.

The Democratic National Committee, after selecting R. Sargent Shriver to succeed Eagleton on the ticket

in 1972, authorized a commission, under the chairmanship of Humphrey, to study the selection of the vice presidential nominee and to make recommendations. That commission now is in the process of soliciting testimony to fulfill its mandate.

The driving force behind the commission apparently is the notion that selecting a candidate for Vice President is too important to be left to the vagaries of whim and politics as perceived by one person—the presidential nominee.

When Lyndon Johnson was considering whether or not to run for Vice President in 1960, he reportedly called John Nance Garner to ask his advice. "I'll tell you, Lyndon," Garner advised, "the vice presidency isn't worth a pitcher of warm spit." Johnson was to discover, however, as Adam had said during his tenure that it was the potential of the office rather than the office itself that made it so critically important.