

The expected has duly occurred: Gerald Ford has been confirmed as Vice President.

Since Spiro T. Agnew resigned after admitting he was a tax evader and since a smog of scandal is now swirling around President Nixon, there is cause for gratitude that the nation now has a man of undoubted financial probity in the second highest office. Furthermore, Mr. Ford is a conventional politician with an open, friendly manner who is known to his colleagues in Congress as a willing team worker and a decent, likeable man. In a political system that requires personal trust and a spirit of cooperation if it is to function effectively, those personal qualities are not inconsiderable assets.

Yet the discouraging conviction persists that the country has not been well served by the President and Congress in this matter and that the 25th Amendment has not worked as its legislative history suggests it was intended to work.

The greater responsibility lies with Mr. Nixon for making no conscientious effort to choose the best man available in the Republican party to serve as a stand-by President. Instead, Mr. Nixon chose a man whom he knew Congress was sure to confirm without much controversy and who was not of sufficient personal stature to be a dangerous rival. Ironically, the bland acceptability that is Mr. Ford's salient quality will probably serve to hasten Republican party pressures for the President to quit.

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The Democrats in Congress must also shoulder some of the responsibility. Speaker Albert and some of his colleagues urged the Ford nomination upon Mr. Nixon, thereby putting the clubby spirit of Congress ahead of the good of the country. On the part of most Democrats in the House and Senate, moreover, there was no genuine determination to act as constitutional surrogates for the people and weigh not only Mr. Ford's character but also his competence to serve—not as a member of Congress from Michigan but as a future President. From the outset, most Democrats had made up their minds to vote for Mr. Ford unless some dreadful scandal were unexpectedly unearthed in his background.

The members of Congress have been notably less conscientious and less exacting in judging Mr. Ford's record and demonstrated capacity for the Vice-Presidency than the Senate was in weighing other nominations of Mr. Nixon for the Supreme Court and lesser offices. If Congress is going to treat a Vice-Presidential nomination in this relaxed fashion, as long as the nominee is a member of the club, the 25th Amendment ought to be revised.