

New plan on veep elections

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WASHINGTON — Senator Robert P. Griffin has come up with an idea whose time has not only arrived, but is long overdue. It is to put more sense into the process of selecting the nation's vice president.

The Michigan Republican's approach would apply to all presidential election years the device of the 25th amendment's emergency procedure under which President Nixon nominated House GOP leader Gerald R. Ford to succeed the resigned Spiro T. Agnew.

It may have flaws and it raises a lot of questions. But the Senate minority whip, who'll offer it as a constitutional amendment Tuesday, says it's a "whale of a lot better than what we have."

His plan would dump the "middle of the night" tapping of a presidential runningmate at each party's national convention and the automatic convention approval that usually follows. Instead each presidential nominee would run alone and the winner would designate his choice for vice president after his victory had been confirmed by the electoral college in December.

Then, as in Ford's case, the vice president-designate would have to be confirmed by majority vote of both the

House and Senate. The deadline would be Inauguration Day, January 20.

The strongest argument likely to be raised against Griffin's proposal is that the man who would be only a heartbeat from the presidency no longer would be chosen by direct vote of the people. But Griffin argues that "people vote for the president, not the vice president" under the present system. As a matter of fact they now vote through electors for the "ticket."

As of the 1968 GOP convention, Griffin recalls, he had "never heard of" the then Maryland Gov. Agnew, who went on the ticket with Nixon largely because his limited experience had left him with the fewest negative points or political enemies.

Agnew's reasons for downfall — the tax evasion growing out of kickbacks when governor — might not have been discovered even under Griffin's plan. But with the lessons of Agnew and Sen. George McGovern's hasty selection and then dumping of Sen. Thomas Eagleton in mid-campaign last year, the commodity of time becomes more precious for the future decisions.

Realistically, instead of each presidential nominee having one runningmate campaigning hard for him in the fall, he conceivably could have a dozen potential vice presidents out showing their stuff.