

Letters to the Ed

A Vice President Now—Or Never?

To the Editor:

Our rulers in Washington are behaving strangely. One of the most vocal members of the House of Representatives has suggested that no attention be paid to the 25th Amendment of the Constitution. "We do not need a Vice President," was the remark, the crispest nullification proposal ever advanced. Others view the amendment with such pretended reverence that they want to make a production out of its operation; time is not of the essence. Still others suggest using it as a ploy to compel adoption of some favored policy not related to filling the office. All seem to have forgotten that if anything happened to the President we would have a new President, the Speaker, with no investigation of his qualities whatsoever.

In the Senate words rival Tennyson's brook. Several talk freely about impeachment, which is the exclusive privilege of the House. If the House were to draw a bill of impeachment, each Senator would fill a dual role, part judge, part juror. Yet the statements stream forth wherever a camera or a microphone can be found. One member of the Senate Watergate Committee, which insists it cannot make up its mind until the last conceivable witness is heard, showed the state of his indecision by calling upon the President to resign forthwith. He made the proposal to the sound of guaranteed thunderous applause. Mr. Meany had said it first.

Most of these prospective judge-jurors have made prejudicial comments that would bar them from any criminal bench or any petit jury where this putative "defendant" was involved. This they well know, most being lawyers. Still, they prejudge freely.

Is it any wonder the public is losing confidence in government? The executive is not the whole government. We have a right to expect the legislative branch to behave as though its members knew and respected their responsibilities.

HENRY M. WRISTON
New York, Oct. 25, 1973

To the Editor:

The resignation of the Vice President has stimulated several proposals for revising the procedure for selecting this official. I think that the Vice-Presidency should be abolished.

In our representative democracy, anyone who becomes President should have been elected by the people on the basis of ability to lead the country.

Under the existing procedure, the Presidential nominee selects the Vice-Presidential nominee on the basis of ability to placate groups among which the Presidential nominee lacks strong support. As the Vice President has no essential function except to wait upon the death or incapacity of the President, and typically Presidents do not favor assigning to the Vice President important duties, persons of Presidential stature are not available for the position. Yet, within the last three decades, two Vice Presidents have become President through the death of Presidents.

The Founding Fathers had good reason for establishing a Vice-Presidency. Transportation was by horse and communication by post. It was not practical to hold a national election on short notice. However, today nationwide television and air travel make it practical to conduct an election for President in a relatively short time.

Upon death or incapacity of a President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, as that elected official after the President most representative of the people, should serve as interim Acting President. As promptly as feasible, an election of a President should be conducted. The Acting President would then return to the position of Speaker.

This recommendation would assure that the President is a person elected by the people on the basis of ability to lead the country. It would avoid the incongruity of a representative democracy subject to a President chosen by one person.

ROSCOE L. BARROW
Oakland, Calif., Oct. 21, 1973