

Senate Gets Plan to Elect President if Nixon Quits

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 9 — Senator William D. Hathaway, Democrat of Maine, urged Congress today to provide for a new national election if President Nixon should leave office before Vice President-designate Gerald R. Ford was sworn in as his successor.

"If the President leaves office, the mandate of last year is negated," Senator Hathaway declared. "It seems logical to me to allow the people themselves to decide who shall then receive what only they can rightfully give."

His proposal, and similar legislation suggested in the last few days by members of the House of Representatives, ran into immediate opposition, however, from Mike Mansfield, the Senate majority leader.

Mr. Mansfield, a Montana Democrat, told newsmen that Congress had "better follow constitutional procedures laid down and play according to Hoyle."

"This is no time for experimentation," he said.

A Belief Is Growing

Congressional observers saw little likelihood that the Hathaway bill would be adopted, in part because of concern among members of the Democratic majority that such a proposal would be viewed as an attempt to gain a partisan advantage from the Republican Administration's domestic difficulties. But Mr. Hathaway's proposal served to illustrate the growing belief on Capitol Hill that Mr. Nixon might be forced to give up the White House.

Newsday, the Long Island newspaper, urged the House in an editorial today to impeach Mr. Nixon "as soon as possible" and added, "Clearly it would serve the national interest if the country were governed by someone other than Richard Nixon."

Leaders in both houses of Congress appeared more intent on accelerating proceedings to confirm the President's nomination of Mr. Ford, the House minority leader, to succeed former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew.

Senator Mansfield, asserting that Mr. Ford made an "excellent" impression at hearings of the Senate Judiciary Committee this week, said that he believed the Senate could vote on the nomination before Thanksgiving.

The House Judiciary Committee announced plans to begin hearings on the Michigan Republican's nomination next Thursday, and House leaders set Dec. 3 as the target date for a confirmation vote.

Target Date in House

Senator Hathaway, however, in a speech to his colleagues, contended, "There is something troubling about a President who is under threat of impeachment or forced resignation having the power to name his successor."

He said that his proposal would build on a precedent established in the Succession Act of 1792 by providing for the following:

¶Congress would set a national election within 90 days after the Presidency and Vice-Presidency both became vacant. Under current law, if both posts became vacant, the Speaker of the House—in this case, Carl Albert, Democrat of Oklahoma — would succeed to the Presidency.

¶Mr. Hathaway's bill would designate the senior House member from the President's party to serve as Acting President until such an election could be held. The senior House Republican now is Mr. Ford.

¶The term of the newly elected President would last only until the next regular national election in 1976, thus enabling the nation to retain the four-year cycle established 200 years earlier.

Mr. Hathaway said that he did not intend to show any disrespect for either Mr. Albert or Mr. Ford. But he contended that the succession of either one to the Presidency would be "incompatible" with the principle of elected national leadership.

Anticipating objections that the special election might give the Democrats a second chance to win what they lost in 1972, the Senator said, "I cannot accept the charge of 'power grab' or 'coup' when the question is actually being returned to the people, the ultimate arbiters of power within our system."

The Senate, recognizing the possibility that international affairs might be affected by the Administration's difficulties at home, adopted by voice today a resolution warning other nations not to doubt "bipartisan unity behind the pursuit of our national security objectives."