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The Liberals, Congress and Gerald Ford

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The saddest thing about the confirmation of Rep. Gerald Ford is what it says about current American political standards and horizons. When such liberal stalwarts as The Washington Post editorial page and Chalmers Roberts can argue for the proposition that a man ought to be confirmed as Vice President of the United States because he is financially honest, one can only see the flags of progress and the high goals of our nation dragging in the dust. I would never have thought the day would come when old friends would be urging the confirmation of an obviously unqualified nominee for the vice presidency simply because it is unnecessary for him to say "I am not a crook."

Mr. Ford's record, as The Post and Mr. Roberts appear to concede, is abominable. As House Minority Leader he sought to gut the Voting Rights Act of 1965, take the fair housing provisions out of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, delete basic provisions from the extension of the Voting Rights Act in 1969 and cripple the Equal Opportunity Amendments of 1971. Indeed, Mr. Ford's legislative decisions are no less anti-civil-rights than the judicial decision of Judges Haynsworth and Carswell (especially when one compares his Northern surroundings with their Southern background) and one might wonder whether the Senate intends to adopt a resolution apologizing to both Messrs. Haynsworth and Carswell.

But civil rights is only the beginning. Mr. Ford's record shows that he has consistently opposed programs to help the disadvantaged, and this includes votes against food stamps, legal services and child care, minimum wages, education, Medicare, OEO, public housing, public works programs, the rat extermination program and rent subsidies. No congressman has sided more consistently with the haves at the expense of the have-nots than Gerald Ford.

Apparently recognizing the negative weight of Mr. Ford's record, The Post seeks support in the Senate Rules Committee hearings and investigation which it calls "notably thorough and serious." Yes, if one

means financial peccadillos; no, if one means qualifications to be Vice President. Indeed, The Post itself states that Mr. Ford's effort to impeach Justice Douglas was marked by "reckless statements, innuendo and great carelessness with facts"; yet no member of the Senate Rules Committee ever asked Mr. Ford to explain a single one of those reckless statements or to indicate whether they had come from Attorney General John Mitchell as part of a conspiracy to get rid of Justice Douglas just as Mitchell had previously conspired against Justice Fortas.

Indeed, both Houses can be said to have failed in their duties under the 25th Amendment. That Amendment gives the President the right to nominate a new Vice President, but it gives Congress a responsibility of review and selection in connection with confirmation far different from its obligation in any other confirmation proceeding. The subject of confirmation (a potential President) and the confirmers (the full Congress rather than the Senate) are both unique in our history. And the President and Congress are acting together here not to nominate and confirm an executive or judicial appointee, but rather to choose, *in lieu of the electorate*, a man who must have the qualifications for President of the United States. This would be true in any event since the only significant attribute of the vice presidency is the possibility of succession to the presidency. But it becomes doubly true in the present circumstance where the calls for impeachment of, or resignation by, the present incumbent grow daily.

Congress, as surrogate for the voters, is obligated to use the tests voters use—stature, competence, experience and philosophy. Financial cleanliness is not enough; a vote for Mr. Ford on that ground is a cop-out on the 25th Amendment.

The Tonkin Bay Resolution had everyone's support, too—that is, almost everyone. But the heroes today are those who said "no" to that Resolution and refused to rubber stamp the White House. Maybe a new group of heroes who know how to say "no" are being made today.

JOSEPH L. RAUH JR.

Washington.  
(The writer is former president of Americans for Democratic Action.)