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The Presidency

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Why did the Founding Fathers create the Vice Presidency?

It appears to me that the vice president serves little or no significant purposes in the American political system. When I think of the role of vice president, the only thing that comes to mind is the fact that if the president dies or is not able to hold office it is the job of the vice president to take over as president. I am sure I share this ideology with many others; however, the role of the vice president is far more complex than that. In this paper, I will discuss the position of the vice presidency and the role of the 25th amendment.

The Framers devoted little attention to the vice president's duties when designing this role. They provided that "he shall be president of the Senate, but shall have no vote, unless they be evenly divided" (U.S. Senate). I feel that when the Framers sat down to debate the powers of the presidency, they were fearful of a powerful executive that would in any way resemble in its powers of the King of England. Therefore, in order to avoid this, they had to put the concentration of power in the hands of more than one so they considered a multi-person executive (This Nation).

Although the Framers finally settled on the Executive Branch being led by a single individual; they remained concerned about the amount of power the President would exert, the method of electing presidents, the relationship between the president and the other two branches of the government, and the manner of succession in the case of a president's death or incapacitation (This Nation). As you can see, the Framers spent a great amount of time and energy in developing the role of the presidency. Likewise, they spent a considerable amount of time and energy weaving checks and balances between the president, the Legislative and Judiciary into the structure of government they created (This Nation). In contrast, with little display and without extensive discussion, the office of the Vice Presidency was added to the constitutional system primarily to address the problem of succession (This Nation).

The Framers decided that the vice president would become the president of the U.S. Senate. This is a role that only allows the vice president to cast votes when the Senate is deadlocked in a tie. This role is not found to be significant to the American Constitutional system; however it was taken seriously by the Framers. The vice president has no formal Constitutional authority. In terms of real political power, vice presidents have exercised only the amounts of power and authority given to them by the presidents under who they have served (This Nation). The vice presidency has also served as an important training ground for future presidents. "One third of America's presidents were first vice presidents, including five of the last nine" (This Nation). Another significant role they play is "balancing a ticket." Vice presidents can play an important role in the election campaigns of the presidential candidates with whom they run. It is important for a presidential candidate to select a likable running mate who he can trust and rely on. For

example, John Kerry who just ran last election for president chose John Edwards a U.S. Senator from North Carolina to be his running mate. He chose Edwards on the platform that he was more charismatic and we can assume that he would be able to attract more votes for Kerry, considering his humble background and good looks. He was someone that Kerry chose to further his campaign and gain support nation wide.

The 25th Amendment clarifies even further the line of succession to the Presidency, and establishes rules for a President who becomes unable to perform his duties while in office. (Legal Information Statute). It was passed by Congress July 6, 1965 and then ratified February 10, 1967. “Amendment XXV (the Twenty-fifth Amendment) of the United States Constitution clarifies an ambiguous provision of the Constitution regarding succession to the Presidency, and established procedures both for filling a vacancy in the office of the Vice President as well as responding to Presidential disabilities” (Wikipedia). The Framers outlined each section to describe the role of the vice president. In summary, section 1 declares that in case of removal of the president from office, the vice president shall become president. Section 2 states, if there is every a vacancy in the office of the vice president, the president shall take office upon confirmation by majority vote of both houses of Congress (Legal Information Institute). Section 3 basically states, that if the President shall declare in writing that he is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, such powers and duties shall be discharged by the Vice President as Acting President (Legal Information Institute). Section 4 is in regards to section 3; when the president is ready or able to take back his role in the Senate, he must do so with a written declaration to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Therefore, Congress shall

decide the issue, assembling within forty eight hours for that purpose if not in session. If the Congress, within twenty one days after receipt of the latter written declaration, or, if Congress is not in session, within twenty one days after Congress is required to assemble, determines by two thirds vote of both Houses that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall continue to discharge the same as Acting President; otherwise, the President shall resume the powers and duties of his office (U.S. Constitution).

As you can see, the vice presidents role is an ambiguous position, with little responsibilities. Vice presidents who served in the past would agree with me. During John Adams tenure as vice president, he remarked: “My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived.” Because of the primary role of the vice president sitting and waiting in the wings, Lyndon Johnson once said, “Every time I came into John F. Kennedy’s presence, I felt like a raven hovering over his shoulders.” Even these two veteran vice presidents agree with me. The role or position of the vice president is an ambiguous role, where one often wonders his or her significance or purpose in the American political system.

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