P.S. to the NEWS
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CHOOSING VICE PRESIDENTS

While the unique American method for choosing Presidents is exceedingly complex, much written about, but little understood by most voters, our method of choosing Vice Presidents is very simple, little written about, and even less understood by the voters.

Republican and Democratic nominees for President are chosen in the Wednesday roll call of states at their respective National Nominating Conventions every four years. After the late Wednesday night decision, when everyone is totally exhausted from listening to speeches, weary from demonstrating, and hoarse from cheering, the Presidential nominee and a dozen or so of his key advisers retreat into The Midnight Session.

There, in the classic smoke-filled room, they argue from midnight until a consensus is reached about who the Vice Presidential nominee should be. The Convention delegates are then expected to approve the decision by acclamation.

Presidential nominee Richard Nixon's two choices for his running-mate are good examples of how bad this system is. In the 1960 Republican Convention Midnight Session, Nixon and his buddies chose Henry Cabot Lodge, a darling of the eastern establishment who contributed nothing except good looks to the ticket, and refused to make more than one campaign appearance a day. Nixon and Lodge then lost a very close election.

In the 1968 Midnight Session, Nixon and his cronies selected Spiro Agnew, a man about whom obviously far too little was known and who resigned after he proved to be a national embarrassment.

In 1940, Democratic Presidential nominee Franklin D. Roosevelt chose Henry Wallace, one of the twentieth century's way-out leftists who had a real guru as his political mentor. In 1944, Roosevelt wanted to dump Vice President Wallace from the ticket in favor of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

Fortunately, Roosevelt was ill and preoccupied with World War II, and Democratic National Chairman Robert Hannegan moved in to fill the vacuum. He told the Midnight conferees that FDR had said <u>either</u> Douglas or Harry Truman would be acceptable, and

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Hannegan then pushed hard for Truman. It was fortunate for America that FDR couldn't make the Midnight Session and Truman lucked into the Presidency rather than Douglas with his four wives, gambling contributors, and liberal notions.

In the one time in recent memory that a Vice President was chosen in the full light of day, without midnight exhaustion or Convention pressures, President Gerald Ford appointed Nelson Rockefeller. He was probably the one man whose morals, ideology and associations would never have been rubber-stamped by Republican delegates.

The top guessing game in every Republican gathering today is "whom will Ronald Reagan pick for his running mate?" The guessing game should be "whom do we want to elect to a position where he might be called upon to govern the United States?"

The time has come to try a new method and almost any change would be an improvement. Instead of treating the duly elected Convention delegates like robots, they should be allowed to choose the Vice Presidential nominee they want.

Whereas the Presidential nominee is often guided by such factors as "balancing the ticket" -- geographically, ideologically, or factionally -- Convention delegates could be expected to be interested in selecting someone who could govern the country if and when that became necessary. After all, the history books record the macabre fact that, every twenty years, the elected President does not live out his term (for example, the Presidents elected in 1900, 1920, 1940, and 1960).

There is precedent for the novel idea of letting Convention delegates choose their own Vice Presidential nominee. In 1948, the Democratic Convention delegates were so enthused by oldtimer Alben W. Barkley's rousing keynote address that they nominated him after rejecting Presidential nominee Harry Truman's choice.

To their everlasting regret, Republican Convention delegates in 1960 failed to have the nerve to do likewise and nominate their keynoter, Congressman Walter Judd. The difference between Judd, one of the finest speakers in the country, and Henry Cabot Lodge could have been the difference between victory and defeat.

Candidates should campaign for the Vice Presidency and the Convention delegates should make their own selection.

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