

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM WRONG ON QUAYLE

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Conventional wisdom concerning George Bush's dilemma over vice President Quayle misstates the case. The conventional argument runs roughly like this: "George Bush made a mistake in naming Dan Quayle to be vice president. He must now grin and bear it, for any attempt to dump Quayle would smack so much of political opportunism that Bush would lose more than he could gain by the effort. The time for dumping Quayle has passed, because we are in the middle of a campaign in which everything would be interpreted as mere electioneering. A President who is suspected of having no principles to start with can ill afford to betray a vice president's loyalty."

Ancient Greeks had a single word to express a concept which is far more elusive for us: *helikia*. That is the right moment, the opportune time, to perform a particular action. The conventional wisdom on Quayle admits that it is right to dump him but insists that there is no longer a right time in which to do so.

This view distorts President Bush's situation. In fact, from the nomination of Quayle until today, there has never been a single moment in which it would have been appropriate for the President to dump Quayle. Lacking some Eagleton factor (the withdrawal of Senator Thomas Eagleton's vice presidential nomination twenty years ago on account of troubling revelations), no credible opportunity for "dismissing" the vice President has arisen. Mr. Quayle certainly served honorably and creditably within the limits of his office. Nor does the Constitution envision a "firing" of the Vice President outside of the process of impeachment.

No, not only is the present not a bad time for Mr. Bush to reconsider, it is the very first practical opportunity he has had to do so since 1988. In fact, the *helikia* for that question is the very week before the opening of the Republican Convention in Houston. Not only would that add appreciable drama to an otherwise predictable convention, it would highlight the decision making of the President in a valuable way.

To be fully responsive to the country's needs—and not just electioneering needs—the President must recognize, however, that he lacks the latitude to act unilaterally. The problem is not that such an act would be unprincipled but that it would be almost impossible for him to convey adequately the principle on which he acts. Accordingly, although this is the right time for action, Mr. Bush may not be able to act if the decision falls squarely on his shoulders.

That inherent limitation in no way impedes the vice President taking matters into his own hands, and demonstrating a statesmanlike regard for the country's interest. Mr. Quayle's decision to step aside, announced the week before the convention, and perhaps highlighted in his delivering a major keynote at the convention, would be an appropriate and positive step.

Following this course the President would be free to address the fundamental issues that face the country not only rhetorically, but through the concrete step of naming a new vice president who could actively and symbolically give voice to the themes that need to be broached.

For example, a full airing of this nation's foreign security policy is little likely to be heard in this campaign, in the path in which it is now set. A shrewd vice presidential nomination could alter that. Similarly, the correct approach to the ills of our inner cities could be highlighted by such a move. Indeed, one might even achieve both steps through a single appointment. Such particular advantages could offer the President all the more freedom to hit hard on the broad themes of economic recovery and world leadership.

The narrow Democrat ticket also gives Bush a great advantage, for he could seek actual electoral advantages through a careful vice presidential nomination—which alone is reason enough for Mr. Quayle (who brings no such advantage) to step aside.

In short, far from being out of consideration the present moment is the only time when a change in the vice presidency makes any sense. Add to that the important reflection that Mr. Bush's first priority has to be governing, not electioneering, and one will see further reasons for a change. A new nominee for the second spot would have the advantage of being able to campaign vigorously and full time in a way that no sitting President ever can do. Further, the sitting vice President would remain a part of the team, including carrying his "family values" mission throughout the country. Thus, this three-person team could bring the campaign home to the country in a most meaningful manner. Finally, the President may well demonstrate through this kind of act that, even here, he gives more attention to governing than to electioneering.