

Reshaping the Model: Clinton, Gore and the New Vice Presidency

Abstract

The Gore Vice Presidency represented an exponential leap forward for that often pilloried institution. Gore achieved significance and influence as vice president well beyond the level his predecessors had experienced. Gore built on the vice-presidential model which Jimmy Carter and Walter F. Mondale had established. The Mondale model presented the vice president as a principal advisor without portfolio with the resources necessary to support such a role. Whereas George H. W. Bush and Dan Quayle had essentially mimicked that model without matching Mondale's significance, Clinton and Gore brought the model to a new level, in part by changing some of its basic assumptions.

Gore was helped by the fact that he measured well on conventional criteria which shape vice-presidential influence. These would include the relationship between the president and vice president; the relationship between the vice president and other central administration personnel, and the resources the vice president offers relative to the Administration's needs.

In addition, the Gore Vice Presidency was shaped by, or illustrated, two unusual features which will contribute to its historical significance. First, Gore was in many respects an unorthodox choice. Clinton rejected the conventional wisdom that presidential candidates should choose a running mate to add geographic, ideological and/or age balance to the ticket. In selecting Gore, he instead chose someone similar to himself in those respects. The selection focused on reinforcing, not balancing, certain aspects of Clinton's identity. The similarities between Clinton and Gore may have contributed to Gore's success.

Second, Gore rejected the caution inherent in the Mondale model. He took on, even

sought, high profile, high risk assignments (e.g., debating Perot, reinventing government). By all accounts, he spoke forcefully and candidly to President Clinton and was not bashful in pushing his own views and priorities. He demonstrated that a vice president can be bold in executing his office without undermining his influence.

The Gore Vice Presidency contributed to the development of the office by raising its stature and influence. Moreover, its unique characteristics suggest variations in conventional criteria for selecting vice presidents and suggest new possibilities for vice-presidential influence given the right set of circumstances.

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