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Ceremony Marking the Ratification of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment to the Constitution

Lyndon B. Johnson

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**Ceremony Marking the Ratification of the
Twenty-Fifth Amendment to the Constitution**
The White House, February 23, 1967

Remarks of President Lyndon B. Johnson

Mr. Vice President, Members of the Cabinet, Senator Bayh, Congressman Celler, Members of the Congress, distinguished Governors, ladies and gentlemen:

It was 180 years ago, in the closing days of the Constitutional Convention, that the Founding Fathers debated the question of Presidential disability. John Dickinson of Delaware asked this question: "What is the extent of the term 'disability' and who is to be the judge of it?" No one replied.

It is hard to believe that until last week our Constitution provided no clear answer. Now, at last, the 25th amendment clarifies the crucial clause that provides for succession to the Presidency and for filling a Vice Presidential vacancy.

Two years ago I urged Congress to initiate this amendment. I said that only our very amazing good fortune and the remarkable stability of the American system, have prevented us from paying the price that "our continuing inaction so clearly invites and so recklessly risks."

Twice in our history we have had serious and prolonged disabilities in the Presidency. In 1881 President Garfield lingered near death for 80 days before succumbing to Guiteau's bullet. President Woodrow Wilson was virtually incommunicado for many months after a stroke, yet dismissed his Secretary of State for attempting to convene a Cabinet meeting. In each case there was controversy, but the Constitution provided no mechanism for installing the Vice President in the Chief Executive's empty chair while the President himself was disabled.

Sixteen times in the history of the Republic the Office of Vice President—the Office created to provide continuity in the Executive—itself has been vacant. Seven men have died while Vice President, John C. Calhoun resigned, and eight others left the Office vacant when succeeding to the Presidency. Again our American Constitution was silent on the selection of a new Vice President.

Once, perhaps, we could pay the price of inaction. But today in this crisis-ridden era there is no margin for delay, no possible justification for ever permitting a vacuum in our national leadership. Now, at last, through the 25th amendment, we have the means of responding to these crises of responsibility.

We pay tribute here in the East Room today to some of those who have worked to provide those means—and thus to assure prompt and orderly continuity in the executive branch of the Government. Herbert Brownell, J. Lee Rankin, and Nicholas Katzenbach were among those who helped to develop this vital reform in the Department of Justice. Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana and Representative Emanuel Celler of New York introduced the measure in the Congress, carried it through exhaustive hearings and many negotiations, and presided over its

passage. Many of the Members of Congress who contributed to its passage are here as our guests today. Many private citizens and organizations, and particularly the leaders of the American Bar Association, helped to gain broad public approval for it. And finally the legislatures of three-quarters of our States have made it the law of our land.

By this thoughtful amendment, they have further perfected the oldest written constitution in the world. They have earned the lasting thanks of the American people, for whom it has so long secured the blessings of liberty.

Thank you very much.

Source: 1 Pub. Papers 217-18 (Feb. 23, 1967)