

Humphrey for President

In 1960 many independent voters could not see much difference between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, two seemingly cool, calculating, ambitious young politicians. However, this newspaper believed that there were significant differences in conviction and outlook. We endorsed Mr. Kennedy.

In 1968 many voters assert that they cannot see much difference between Mr. Nixon and Hubert H. Humphrey, but, again, this newspaper believes that there are significant differences in conviction and outlook. We endorse Mr. Humphrey.

* * *

Mr. Humphrey has superior claims to the Presidency in three critical areas. The first of these is foreign affairs, specifically arms control and the search for peace. The most important international issue today is a slowing of the nuclear arms race. The competition in these deadly weapons is once more spiraling upward and threatens to slip out of human control. No subject will be more important for the next President. For nearly twenty years Mr. Humphrey has devoted himself tirelessly to this problem. He was the author of the bill establishing an independent Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in 1961. In season and out he worked to stop the nuclear tests which were poisoning the atmosphere, efforts that finally resulted in the limited Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. President Kennedy was indulging in no exaggeration when he said to Mr. Humphrey: "This is your treaty."

Mr. Humphrey is now actively working for the ratification of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which would commit the existing nuclear nations not to distribute nuclear weapons to other countries. He would, we believe, dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the search for practical ways of lessening the overwhelming nuclear danger. As the original proponent of the Peace Corps and of the Food-for-Peace Program, he has the talent and the active concern needed to strengthen the United Nations and to build new international institutions.

In contrast, Mr. Nixon took no initiative on disarmament when he was Vice President and showed much less interest in the subject. He is now urging a delay in the ratification of the Nonproliferation Treaty. Even worse, he has resurrected the "missile gap" argument misused by President Kennedy and insists that he will not enter into arms negotiations with the Soviet Union until sometime in the future when this country has reached new and unspecified superiority in nuclear strength. He is busily promising to outstrip the Russians in space and to build a nuclear Navy "second to none." The United States does not need a President intent on speeding up both the arms race and the space race.

* * *

In addition to being an internationalist with a broad and imaginative outlook in foreign affairs, Mr. Humphrey is a proven activist in domestic affairs. He was the original sponsor of Medicare and the skillful parliamentary manager for much of the social reform legislation enacted during the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations. He fully understands that the desperately urgent needs of the nation's cities for better housing, higher quality education, cleaner air, improved hospitals and mass transit facilities can only be met if there is vigorous Presidential leadership and coherent public planning.

While Mr. Humphrey attempts to get to the root of urban problems, Mr. Nixon is promising, in effect, to attack the surface signs of social unrest by more energetic use of police measures. His modest proposals for encouraging "black capitalism" through tax incentives are all right as far as they go, but they do not go very far. His is an essentially conservative economic strategy involving deferment of costly new domestic programs for years. This strategy is full of danger, threatening decay and congestion for the nation's hard-pressed cities.

* * *

The third area in which Mr. Humphrey is unquestionably preferable to his opponent lies in the quality of his political leadership and in the character of his political support. Mr. Humphrey is the only candidate in this election who has substantial backing in both the white and the Negro communities. He has earned

Negro trust because no man in public life has worked harder or longer to achieve equality of opportunity for all citizens. It is a matter for considerable concern whether the next President will be able to communicate effectively with black as well as white citizens and whether in his capacity as a national party leader he sees himself primarily competing with George C. Wallace for reactionary segregationist votes or as heading a liberal-and-moderate coalition drawn from both races.

An endorsement of a candidate is in this instance also a favorable judgment on the personality and character of one man and an adverse judgment on his rival. Mr. Humphrey is a warm, generous, idealistic, open man. Mr. Nixon has gradually risen above the personal abuse and the narrow partisanship of his early campaigns, but he remains slick and evasive on some of the central issues.

* * *

We have left until last the perplexing question of Vietnam. As we have made clear in many previous editorials, The Times does not find the statements of either candidate satisfactory on the war issue. But Mr. Humphrey has given unmistakable signals that he intends, if elected, to move away from the errors of the past. It is our judgment, based on an appraisal of the character and public record of the two candidates, that Mr. Humphrey would be more inclined than his opponent to seize the initiative for peace.

It must be borne in mind that the Vice-Presidency is a uniquely awkward office. No man has ever been seen at his best in it. A Vice President is in a weak position because he has no personal mandate from the people separate from that of the President on whose ticket he was elected. Yet he has a constitutional responsibility to serve as the President's stand-in, a responsibility which he cannot relinquish as easily as a Cabinet officer or lesser official can resign an appointive office.

Like most of his predecessors, Mr. Humphrey has resolved the ambiguities of his office in favor of defending the President's policies in public and trying to influence them in private. Not until the memoirs of the Johnson Administration have been written will it be possible to assess Mr. Humphrey's role in the international policy struggles of this Administration over the "bombing pauses" and other Vietnam decisions. But it is significant that the former members of the Johnson Administration who are rallying to Mr. Humphrey's support include its best-known doves.

* * *

Looked at in the perspective of his 23 years in public life, Hubert Humphrey is a humanitarian, an authentic and effective liberal, and a man of proved character, courage and judgment who can be depended upon to lead the nation in the ways of peace.

In the span of the present campaign, proof that his judgment is superior to that of Mr. Nixon has been provided by their respective choices for Vice President. Senator Edmund S. Muskie has experience, dignity and moral force. He is in himself a cogent argument for preferring the Democratic ticket, especially when it is recalled that four Vice Presidents in this century have succeeded to the Presidency on the death of the incumbent.

In the brief period since nomination, Gov. Spiro T. Agnew has already proved from his injudicious, intemperate remarks that he is utterly inadequate.

* * *

The sole persuasive argument offered for Mr. Nixon's election is that he might produce a period of calm and consolidation. But this presupposes that he is a popular and widely trusted figure like General Eisenhower, which he manifestly is not, as his divisive and partisan record over the years makes clear. Moreover, the strenuous demands upon America's leadership both at home and abroad do not permit four years of rest and passivity. This critical era calls for a leader with ideas, enthusiasm, energy and a clear moral commitment.

This newspaper believes that Hubert H. Humphrey is such a leader, and in the truly critical situation—foreign and domestic—in which this country finds itself, we strongly urge his election to the Presidency of the United States.