



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

The Modern Vice Presidency

On April 19, 2021, former vice president [Walter Mondale](#) passed away at age 93. His life was one well lived and full of many notable accomplishments. But, it is his four years as vice president, from 1977 to 1981, that stand out. In scholarly and political circles it is often said that Walter Mondale shaped the modern vice presidency. The relationship he had with President Jimmy Carter forged the path for subsequent vice presidents to being an equal partner with the president with whom they served.

The formal role of the vice president is narrow. Under [Article I, Section III, Clause 5](#) of the U.S. Constitution, "The Vice President of the United States shall be President of the Senate, but shall have no Vote, unless they be equally divided." That is it! In fact, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first vice president, [John Nance Garner](#), reportedly described the role as "[not worth a bucket of warm spit](#)."

Because everything else a vice president does is at the discretion of the president, how did Walter Mondale help shape the modern vice presidency?



Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale at the Democratic National Convention, New York City, 1976



**Some Past Vice Presidents (left to right):
Dan Quayle, Walter Mondale, Dick Cheney, Al Gore, Joe Biden & Mike Pence**

The answer lies in a promise made and kept by President Carter. Before accepting Carter's offer to be his running mate, Mondale insisted that he be allowed to act as a true policy advisor and be included in the president's decision-making process. He was asking to be a full governing partner.

Consequently, President Carter had the vice president's office moved to the West Wing of the White House from the Old Executive Office Building outside the White House. This move ensured that the vice president would be very involved in the policy and decision making of the president. Carter made sure that Mondale received daily intelligence briefings, participated in national security debates, attended cabinet

meetings, and was privy to the nation's nuclear security plans. They had lunch together once a week, communicating with one another regularly.

Following his passing, President Carter said, "During our administration, Fritz [Mondale's nickname] used his political skill and personal integrity to transform the vice presidency into a dynamic, policy-driving force that had never been seen before and still exists today." President Biden said, "It was Walter Mondale who defined the vice presidency as a full partnership and helped provide a model for my service." In the end, Mondale's actions and practices ensured his successors would be prepared should they become president of the United States.

To Think and To Do: Based on your understanding of the modern vice presidency, conduct research on the actions and initiatives so far of the current vice president, Kamala Harris. Based on what you've read, is Vice President Harris following in the footsteps of former Vice President Mondale as a full governing partner with the president?

Learn MORE about the vice presidency.

- [Vice President Kamala Harris](#), from The White House
- [Vice President Overview \(President of the Senate\)](#), from Senate.gov
- [Chronological List of Presidents, First Ladies and Vice Presidents](#), from Library of Congress



Vice President Kamala Harris



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