

DRINKS WITH DEAD PEOPLE

QUARANTINE EDITION

APRIL 3, 2020:
[JOHN TYLER](#)

What happens when something happens to the U.S. President? For the first word on succession, you'll need to go back to 1840 and then-Vice President John Tyler.

THE STORY

William Henry Harrison won the 1840 Presidential election, gave the longest inauguration speech in American history (nearly two hours), and in grimly poetic retribution, died a scant month later of pneumonia. He was the first president to die in office. What to do next? Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution reads:

"In Case of the Removal of the President from Office, or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of the said Office, the Same shall devolve on the Vice President..."

This only partially helps: does the Vice President simply assume the "Powers and Duties" of the office, or the office itself? Many of the political players in Washington, including much of Harrison's cabinet, felt that the Constitution set up an "acting presidency" whereby John Tyler would retain the office of Vice President while taking care of relevant presidential duties.

Tyler liked Door Number Two better. Without waiting for input or approval, he arranged to take the oath of office as soon as possible and assumed the full office of President of the United States. He was, therefore, the first Vice President to move into the American presidency absent election, and did not escape some serious eye-rolling over his tactics: opponents jokingly called him "His Accidency," which he did not like.

The [25th Amendment](#) formally codified the "Tyler Precedent," clarifying that on the death or removal of the President, the Vice President formally accedes to the office; while in the case of an incapacitated Commander in Chief, the Vice President acts on a temporary assumption of duty.

Read on [at the blog](#) for more detail and resources.

DISCUSS:

What would you have done in John Tyler's shoes?

Did you know John Tyler still has [living grandchildren](#)? Take a moment to chat about how bananas that is.

The 1840 election had a lot of public stereotyping and meme-ish media. What role do media and culture play in an election? What's good and bad about that?

Hi, I'm Betsy. Stuck at home? Let's learn history together, because the past helps us to understand that we are not alone. Weekday updates during #COVID19.

Questions? Comments? Say hello.

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READ MORE:

["The 25th Amendment, Explained,"](#)

Vox

["His Accidency,"](#) Washington Post

["John Tyler and Presidential Succession,"](#) The White House Historical Society

Primary source: ["Harrison, Union, Liberty and Independence,"](#) Library of Congress