

Contrasting Campaigns: Zebulon B. Vance and the North Carolina Gubernatorial Elections of 1862 and 1864

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The North Carolina gubernatorial campaign of 1862 was not supposed to occur in that year. Normally, the election for governor would have been held in 1863. But the incumbent, secessionist governor John W. Ellis, had died on July 7, 1861. At the time, of course, North Carolina did not have the office of lieutenant governor. Consequently, the task of serving as the state's chief executive fell to the speaker of the senate, Henry Toole Clark, an Edgecombe County planter and secessionist Democrat. Clark would serve until an election for governor took place. The General Assembly called for that election to be held in August 1862, after the legislative session had ended.¹

Raleigh newspaper editor William W. Holden became a major figure in that campaign. Despite his former ties to the Democratic Party and his vote for secession at the state secession convention held in May 1861, Holden was a strong Unionist, and he began leading a movement of growing opposition to the Democratic administrations of Ellis and Clark and their support for the new policies of the Confederate government. With Holden as its chief mouthpiece through his *North Carolina Standard*, that opposition movement led to the formation of the Conservative Party. Largely pre-war Whigs and Unionists, the Conservatives blamed the state Democratic leadership and the Confederate government for the capture and occupation of much of coastal North Carolina by the Federal military in early 1862. They decried wartime shortages and loss of lives on the battlefields. They questioned the effectiveness of President Jefferson Davis's administration and the legality of some of its policies, which seemed to them to defy the concepts of state and individual rights. They were particularly rankled by the Confederate Conscription Act of April 1862, which drafted into military service men aged eighteen to thirty-five. The Conservatives, hoping to form a coalition with Democrats who had Unionist sympathies, began holding meetings throughout the state to nominate local candidates and propose candidates for governor.

Meanwhile, the Democrats, sometimes referring to themselves as the Confederate Party to attract wide support, selected William Johnston of Mecklenburg County (who was born in Lincoln County) as their candidate for governor. Johnston had been a Whig before the war but became an ardent secessionist after Lincoln's election as president in November 1860. He served as a delegate in the secession convention the following May. Before the war, he had been an attorney and businessman, serving as president of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad Company and the Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio Railroad Company. When nominated for governor, he held the position of state commissary general, with the rank of colonel.²

In April 1862, about thirty Conservative delegates convened in Raleigh to determine the party's gubernatorial candidate. All were former Whigs except Holden, the ex-Democrat. The leading nominee was William A. Graham, a prominent Whig and past governor, U.S. senator, secretary of the navy, and vice-presidential candidate. But Graham declined to run and suggested John Pool, a former U.S. senator who had run for governor as a Whig in 1860 and therefore would emphasize the party's strong Whig element. Some members of the caucus, however, stressed nominating a man who could attract Democrats as well. Delegates James M. Leach and John A. Gilmer, former U.S. congressmen, proposed Zebulon Baird Vance of Buncombe county, who had been their Whig colleague in the House of Representatives.³

Vance was born in 1830 at a Buncombe County homestead on Reems Creek near Asheville. His father, David Vance, was a relatively prosperous businessman and landowner who moved to northern Buncombe County shortly after Zebulon was born. Vance had the advantage of a basic but limited education before attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for one year in 1852. Admitted to the bar, he practiced law and served as Buncombe County solicitor. In 1854 he was elected to the state legislature, proclaiming himself "a regular built, old fashioned Whig." He later boasted that "I was raised in the Whig faith, and taught to revere the names of Clay, Webster, and other great leaders of the party. . . . I learned to value the Federal Union, and to admire conservatism." He failed to win election to the state senate in 1856 but did secure a vacant seat in Congress in 1858, to which he was reelected in 1859.⁴

Following Lincoln's election in 1860, seven slaveholding states, with South Carolina in the vanguard, seceded from the United States and formed the provisional Confederate States of America. But Vance and his native state did not consider Lincoln's election to be sufficient cause for secession. He continued to call for loyalty to the Federal government until Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and Lincoln asked the loyal states for troops to suppress the rebellion. Vance then shed his mantle of Unionism and accepted secession as the

best course for his state. North Carolina convened a convention in Raleigh on May 17, 1861, and on the twentieth the delegates passed an ordinance of secession and then ratified the provisional Confederate constitution. At that point, Vance cast his fate with the Confederacy and its efforts to secure Southern independence. He never wavered from that position until the war's end.

With the outbreak of the war, Vance joined a Buncombe County company known as the Rough and Ready Guards and rose to be its captain. He was soon appointed colonel of the Twenty-sixth Regiment North Carolina Troops and led that regiment at the Battle of New Bern in March 1862 and the Battle of Malvern Hill in Virginia on July 1, 1862. Within weeks of Malvern Hill, Vance left his regiment. He had been elected governor of North Carolina.⁵

Vance's military career might have been a factor in the Conservative caucus's decision to choose him as the party's candidate. Perhaps they felt that his war experience in the Confederate cause would give him broader appeal outside the Whig alliance. After the Conservatives meeting in Raleigh selected him as their candidate, they sent his nomination to local primaries for ratification. While encamped in Virginia on June 15, Vance wrote a letter to his strong supporter Edward J. Hale, editor of the *Fayetteville Observer*, accepting the nomination as the Conservative candidate. Hale published the letter in the July 19 issue of the *Observer*. Hale also reviewed the acceptance letter with Holden, who then published it in the *Standard* on July 25. In his letter, Vance portrayed himself as a man above party politics. He was not, he asserted, the product of a political party but rather a representative of the people, summoned to lead them in a time of crisis. The Conservatives continued this theme in their attacks on Johnston, claiming that he, unlike Vance, was the puppet of a party machine.⁶

During the ensuing election, Vance stayed with his regiment, and neither he nor Johnston openly campaigned. They remained silent, declining to speak publicly, both wanting to avoid the taint of party politics. Such public reticence was not common practice in North Carolina politics of that time. During the preceding two decades, gubernatorial candidates had appeared on the stump throughout the state to garner votes. But the debate over Johnston's and Vance's qualifications and their positions on the issues facing voters was waged in the state's newspapers, which were about evenly divided in the numbers that supported each candidate. Ironically and paradoxically, Holden's Democratic *Standard* served as the Conservatives' chief mouthpiece and backed Vance. Equally contradictory, the Whig newspaper the *Raleigh Register* became the main organ for the Democratic (or Confederate) candidate, Johnston.⁷ The main charge levied against Vance by the Democratic newspapers was that he was a Unionist at heart and not supportive of the Confederate cause, including the Conscription Act. The Conservative journals denounced Johnston as an original secessionist, claiming that such secessionists in

the Confederate and state governments were responsible for poor progress in winning or ending the war, growing inflation, lack of support for soldiers and their families, the loss of much of coastal North Carolina to the Federal army, and the Confederate government's unpopular conscription, taxes, and usurpation of civil liberties. The *Standard* declared that Johnston was a "party man" and "the candidate of the spoils party office holders, and the ultra partizan papers of the State."⁸

As it awaited the final election returns, the *Spirit of the Age* in Raleigh apparently had difficulty deciding which candidate to endorse. It announced that "Either Colonel Vance or Col. Johnston would make a worthy, competent patriotic governor—and those who have vilified either, for party purposes, will now admit the fact." The newspaper implied that Vance, despite his Unionism, would defend the Confederate cause with the same vigor as Johnston. "Let whomever be returned as Governor and legislators, if our common enemy believe that their election is any evidence of sympathy for the old Union, or indication of disposition to cease the struggle for Southern independence and Southern nationality, the sequel will prove how egregiously they have been deceived: North Carolina is as true to the Southern Confederacy as the needle to the pole, and she will never give up the struggle till victory is ours, final and complete."⁹ A Caswell County editor also defended Vance against charges of Union sympathy. He lectured his readers that the press opposing Vance's election was not the voice of the majority of the population, and that "the Yankees . . . are most outrageously mistaken if they infer from the tone of the press in opposition to Colonel Vance that his supporters are Union sympathizers, or that one of his supporters would not shoot a live Yankee as quick as the quickest of Mr. Johnston's supporters."¹⁰

In Vance's home county of Buncombe, however, the *Asheville News* supported Johnston and denounced Vance's supporters for attempting to discredit the Confederate Party candidate. The newspaper discounted implications by Holden that Johnston was more loyal to South Carolina, as the seat of secession, than to the Tar Heel State. "We are informed on good authority," asserted the editor, "that the report is industriously circulated in the various military camps, by Mr. Vance's friends and the *Standard's* special strickers [*sic*], that Mr. Johnston is a native of South Carolina. Numerous other false statements are made concerning him—all for party purposes." The *News* particularly vented its anger at the *Standard*: "This venal sheet says we have charged all the old Union men of this State with being traitors. This is a falsehood, and we defy the *Standard* . . . to produce the proof, or stand convicted before the public as the basest calumniator [*sic*] and most infamous liar in the state!"¹¹ The *Charlotte Daily Bulletin* also noted the preference of the Queen City's voters for Johnston over Vance.¹² The editor of the *Standard*, however, kept up a steady and successful attack on Johnston and the secessionists, whom he labeled "destructives." Holden's biographer, William C. Harris, writes that "Holden, whose experience and skill in attacking his opponents gave him a distinct advantage in a newspaper war, was remarkably effective in the 1862 campaign."¹³ Holden's attacks

became so relentless, heated, and vindictive that Vance wrote to his friend George Little in Raleigh on June 1, 1862, asking him to encourage Holden to tone down his rhetoric and to “try and teach him moderation” in his editorials. “As sure as you live,” Vance wrote, “moderation, no partyism, harmony and deprecation of strife constitutes [*sic*] our true tactics.” But as Harris notes, “Long a practitioner of the invective style of journalism, Holden could not be persuaded by Vance’s friend to temper his language. He continued to hiss scorn at the secessionists and their policy of denouncing and proscribing former unionists for their presumed disloyalty.”¹⁴

The Democratic, or Confederate, press countered by attacking Vance’s credibility, questioning his war record. Realizing that he was a popular candidate, the secessionist newspapers attempted to portray him as an intellectual rube incapable of manning the office of wartime governor. The *Raleigh Register* described him as “the young stump-speaking, joke-telling, huzza-boying party politician.”

The election outcome proved to be what Vance scholar Gordon B. McKinney has called “the first true [political] landslide in North Carolina history.”¹⁵ North Carolina troops cast their votes on July 28, and civilians on August 4. Vance won the election by a large majority, receiving 72.7 percent of the combined vote. He received 65.8 percent of the army vote and 74 percent of the civilian vote, carrying all but twelve counties. According to historian Marc Kruman, “By far the largest margin of victory in any gubernatorial election to that date, it represented a dramatic popular repudiation of the Democratic leadership that had controlled the state for more than a decade.”¹⁶ In the election, Conservatives also secured a large majority of seats in the General Assembly and replaced Democratic officeholders, including judges and solicitors, with members of their own party. They elected William A. Graham to the Confederate Senate and former Whig politician Jonathan Worth as state treasurer. They rewarded Holden with the position of state printer.¹⁷

With his election secured, Vance addressed his regiment for the last time on the evening of August 15 in camp at Petersburg, Virginia. His officers presented him with a testimonial sword. The following morning, he departed for Raleigh, where he spent the night at the Yarborough House hotel. In a speech to a crowd in front of the hotel, he remarked that his election affirmed North Carolinians’ rejection of party politics. He effectively refuted his opponents’ accusations about his lack of involvement in the battles of New Bern and Malvern Hill and pledged to support Confederate independence.¹⁸ On the morning of August 17, he left Raleigh for Asheville. Before leaving, he wrote the following letter to William A. Graham.

The state of my health renders it absolutely necessary that I should rest at home as long as possible before the inauguration. Every one I meet seems to think that my address should be

prepared with some care, in view of the impression my election is likely to have upon the North, aided by the slanders of our opponents. As I shall have to prepare it at home, without the presence of many with whom I should like to consult, I should be greatly obliged for, and most thankfully receive, any suggestions from yourself, as to the character of the address it would be proper for me to deliver, etc.

I shall leave for home this afternoon, feeling quite unwell, but hope and believe that two weeks in our mountain air will restore me. Write me at Asheville.¹⁹

If Graham offered any advice about the inaugural speech, it has not survived. But David L. Swain—president of the state university, former governor, and Vance’s mentor—did advise his former pupil. “This will afford you,” he wrote, “an opportunity to define your views . . . in advance of the meeting of the General Assembly. Your overwhelming majority, will render this a most important document at home and abroad. Your note to the newspapers was well written, and in the proper spirit. Your inaugural will of course be well considered, more extended and more elaborate, but brief nevertheless and to the point. You entered the conflict determined never to cease your efforts in behalf of your country, until every invader was driven or withdrawn from her borders. You will probably not be expected to go beyond a general and decisive expression of your views on this subject. It is important that with respect to this question your opponents at the South, and our public enemies at the North, should not have it in their power to misrepresent you.” Both Swain and Vance realized the significant impact that his inaugural address might have on his success as North Carolina’s wartime governor. It was especially important that he state clearly that he intended to support the Confederate war effort until Southern independence was achieved.²⁰ As he prepared to be sworn in as governor, Vance put considerable thought and care into preparing his inaugural speech.

Vance was inaugurated as governor on September 8, 1862. For the morning ceremony, a crowd gathered on the square at the State Capitol. The Johnny Reb Band from Vance’s Twenty-sixth Regiment had arrived in Raleigh from the Petersburg camp two days earlier and serenaded the capital city with martial airs and other tunes. On inauguration day, the band marched from the Yarborough House hotel to Capitol Square, where it played for the first time publicly “Governor Vance’s Inauguration March,” composed for the event by Edward Leinbach, brother of Julius Augustus Leinbach, a regimental band musician and diarist.²¹

Vance spoke to the crowd from a platform on the west side of the Capitol. He delivered a brief history of the events that led to North Carolina's reluctant secession from the Union. He reminded those gathered that "our separation from the government of the United States . . . was not a whim or sudden freak but the deliberate judgement of our people. Any other course would have involved the deepest degradation, the vilest dishonor, and the direst calamity." He professed that he was under no illusions about the terrible conflict that secession had wrought. But with North Carolina's having joined the other Confederate States, "we have but the one, great and all absorbing theme. The war which we are fighting for our liberties and independence, is indeed the sea which will receive our every stream of thought."²²

Although Vance used his powerful oratory to excite the crowd and exhort the people of his state to support the Confederate war effort, he also was astute enough to recognize that many of his citizens were becoming disgruntled with the laws and policies coming from the administration of Jefferson Davis in Richmond. He knew that many North Carolinians considered the Confederate conscription law of April 1862 to be a repressive violation of their civil rights, and he was careful to pander to this faction of his constituency. He urged North Carolinians to accept the provisions of the conscription law despite their concerns and, when called to the army, to serve faithfully in the cause of Southern independence. But lest his call for adherence to the conscription law leave the impression that he was forsaking the rights of North Carolinians in order to bolster the Davis government, Vance reminded everyone that he would not allow the Tar Heel State to suffer from too much Confederate authority, especially military rule. Nor would he forsake local interests and autonomy.²³

Thus, in his inaugural address, Vance set the paradoxical tone that would characterize his terms as governor. As he would on so many occasions during the war, he strove to keep North Carolina united and under control by proclaiming himself a defender of individual and state rights and simultaneously urging North Carolinians to bend to the will of the Confederate government. Once his election was certain, most of the state rallied behind him as a champion of the war effort and the establishment of a Confederate nation.²⁴ "It is evident," concluded the *Charlotte Daily Bulletin*, "that Col. Vance is determined not to relax efforts that be deemed necessary to prosecute the war vigorously, looking to a distinct nationality and total independence of the Yankee nation."²⁵

A number of factors contributed to Vance's success in the gubernatorial election of 1862. Whigs and Unionist Democrats tended to vote for him. He won the soldiers' vote. Many voters who did not participate in the election of 1860 returned to the ballot box in 1862, and most supported Vance. Those areas where yeoman farmers were predominant over large slaveholders were strongholds of support for Vance.

Several Piedmont counties where anti-Confederate and peace sentiments were prominent also voted for him. Then too, the persistent Conservative newspaper campaign—especially that of Holden’s *Standard*—kept his name before the public. In the end, writes McKinney, “the Conservative Party coalition that elected Vance contained a variety of groups, not all of them compatible.”²⁶

And then there was Vance himself, as savvy and promotable a political candidate as ever has been involved in North Carolina politics. Vance probably ranks as the most effective stump-speaking campaigner in the history of North Carolina elections. Throughout his career, large crowds gathered to hear him, laugh at his jokes, and applaud his down-home public persona. But in the gubernatorial election of 1862, he was wise to keep a low profile and remain with the army until after the election—thereby discounting any charge by his opponents that he had abandoned his military post because of a lack of courage or because of political ambition. Declining to campaign publicly also helped him escape accusations that he was a player in party politics, a stamp that both candidates wanted to avoid. It was better, he and his advisers agreed, to let the press campaign for him, while he remained the loyal soldier in the field, waiting to be summoned by the people to lead the state in its time of peril. But two years of devastating war followed Vance’s election in 1862, and he would have to adopt new tactics in the gubernatorial campaign of 1864.

By the summer of 1863, the Civil War had turned decidedly against the Confederacy. Federal invasion and battles throughout the South had claimed the lives of many North Carolina soldiers and maimed many more. Shortages and devastation inflicted suffering directly on the civilian population. The Federal blockade of ports had become increasingly effective, and scarcities of every sort of luxury and necessity had been felt by the folk on the home front. The Conscription Act had been expanded, opposition to forced military service had grown, and desertion was on the rise. The poorer classes found substitution and the “Twenty-Negro” regulation to be particularly onerous aspects of the draft. The Confederate government had imposed demoralizing martial law and suspended habeas corpus in some areas of the South. That had not yet occurred in North Carolina, but many citizens feared that it might. The Confederacy’s tax-in-kind and impressment laws added to the growing disaffection. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, and the subsequent enlistment of slaves into the Union army created—among slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike—a widespread and chilling fear that slaves would be incited to rise up and murder whites. Any hopes for foreign intervention on behalf of the Confederate cause had been dashed by the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation in Britain and Europe, as well as the failure of the Southern armies to win a decisive battle. Then came the devastating defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July.

Talk of peace negotiations and an end to the war began to grow. The efforts of the secret anti-Confederate and peace organization known as the Heroes of America spread throughout the state from the so-called Quaker Belt of the Piedmont.²⁷ Many North Carolinians started to embrace the view of one farmer who wrote to Governor Vance on July 30 that "There seems to be no escape for us from these sore troubles but to make peace with the North on the best terms we can."²⁸ They began to agitate for a peaceful conclusion to the fighting, and they found a champion in William W. Holden, editor of the *Standard* and Vance's old political ally and promoter. Holden openly called for peace negotiations, and organized peace meetings convened in a number of communities.²⁹

In response, Vance issued a public proclamation exhorting North Carolinians to remain loyal to the Confederate war effort and forgo any peace meetings that might divide and turn them against each other.³⁰ Shortly after Vance's proclamation appeared, Georgia troops passing through Raleigh broke into the *Standard* office and scattered Holden's papers and the ink and type from his press. The ransacking soldiers, from the command of General Henry Benning, were responding to resolutions adopted in Virginia by Confederate officers, most of whom were from North Carolina. The resolutions called for the suppression of Holden and the peace proponents. On the day following the attack on the *Standard* office, allies of Holden sacked the office and destroyed the presses of the *State Journal*, a Raleigh newspaper that had joined the campaign to gag the *Standard*. The trouble intensified when angered soldiers from a passing Alabama regiment announced plans to seize Holden, whose friends vowed to protect him. During all three altercations, Vance personally managed to calm mobs and restore quiet in the capital.

Holden himself expressed gratitude for the governor's actions in preventing bloodshed and preserving public order. He promised to support Vance as long as the state's chief executive adhered to the true principles of the Conservative Party. For a short time, no more peace meetings convened.³¹

Although Vance early dismissed peace talks as a viable option for ending the war, Holden's success in stirring up peace sentiment made him aware that a serious and potentially dangerous movement was rising in the state. As a politician committed to the success of the Confederacy, as well as to his own political future, he could not afford to ignore the rumblings among those who were dissatisfied with the war and wanted to see it brought to a peaceful conclusion. After all, much of eastern North Carolina was in Federal hands. If the war dragged on and turned decisively against the Confederacy, sentiment for reconciliation might establish itself in that area and spread to the rest of the state. Vance also had to deal with the reality that considerable war opposition existed among folk in the Mountains and the Quaker Belt of the Piedmont. Furthermore, in the November 1863 congressional elections,

the peace proponents had seen their candidates win a large number of seats in the Confederate Congress. Encouraged by their election, Holden renewed his attacks on the Confederate government, protesting such violations of personal liberty as conscription and impressment.³²

As 1863 ended, Vance might have had second thoughts about whether he really wanted to run for reelection in the August 1864 gubernatorial race. His first term as governor had saddled him with tremendous problems and responsibilities that he could not have foreseen when he took office. The effort to balance the complaints and needs of North Carolinians with the demands for support from the Confederate government had been exhausting. His health and outlook declined. "I have been sick and quite gloomy," he told Edward J. Hale, his political confidant. In December, Vance became bedridden as the result of a "severe cold" and an operation in which he had a "large tumor" removed from his neck. "Six months ago you would have learned of my illness through the *newspapers*," he lamented, as if he felt he was going unnoticed and unappreciated.³³ To add to his despondency, apparently he also was having doubts about his ability to win reelection if he opposed a peace convention. Perhaps, he told his mentor David L. Swain, he would "quietly retire to the army and find death which will enable my children to say that their father was not consenting to their degradation."³⁴ But Vance quickly rallied and began planning his tactics for the upcoming election.

It was obvious, though, that in 1864 there would be no alliance between Holden and Vance, as there had been in 1862. Not only would Vance not have the support of Holden and his *Standard* in the new election, he would have to contend with the editor's vehement opposition. By late 1863, Holden had let the governor know in no uncertain terms that he and his allies would oppose Vance's reelection in 1864 if he refused to support a state peace convention. Vance was equally determined that he would never endorse such a meeting. "I can not of course favor such a thing for any existing cause," he wrote to his adviser William A. Graham on January 1, 1864. "I will see the Conservative party blown into a thousand atoms and Holden and his understrappers in hell . . . before I will consent to a course which I think would bring dishonor and ruin upon both state & Confederacy!"³⁵ Vance had urged his allies in the press to begin attacking Holden on his behalf in the summer of 1863. On August 11, he encouraged Edward J. Hale to assault Holden and the peace men in the columns of the *Fayetteville Observer*: "Pitch into them—Cry aloud and spare not—My life popularity and everything shall go into this contest."³⁶

But in January 1864, the governor had not yet proclaimed publicly his personal opposition to Holden and the peace convention. As he saw the matter, his greatest difficulty in winning the election lay in garnering the votes of old Union men in his own party who might be receptive to the idea of reconciliation with the United States. He did not worry—as did some of his supporters, such as Hale—that the

state's secessionists might run a third candidate in the election. The supporters of the Confederate government, he reasoned, would have no choice but to vote for him in preference to Holden. He intended to be reelected by winning the votes of both the secessionists, or "destructives," and the members of his own party who might be considering Holden and peace negotiations. As the outcome of the election would prove, he was absolutely correct in his assessment for winning the election. Still, an element of uncertainty plagued him early in 1864.

As Vance and his wife worried at the bedside of one of their children who was "dangerously ill," the governor vacillated in publicly announcing his platform. He also felt uncertain about how and when to proceed in his race for reelection and wanted to wait for advice from his Conservative supporters.³⁷ Such advice was not long in coming. John D. Hyman, a friend and former co-editor of the *Asheville Spectator* who soon became editor of the pro-Vance Raleigh *Conservative*, wrote to Vance on February 17. "By your silence you are daily losing friends," Hyman warned him. "The Democratic and secession party allege that Holden is your spokesman and that you are in favor of a convention; while a large number of conservatives are committing themselves to a convention, whether by signing petitions or participating in public meetings held at Holden's suggestion—whereas they would commit themselves in opposition if they knew you were opposed to it."³⁸ Five days later, on February 22, Vance publicly denounced Holden's peace convention, when he made his first campaign speech in Wilkesboro, the seat of Wilkes County, a stronghold of Unionist and peace sentiment. He followed with public appearances in Statesville, Taylorsville, and Salisbury before returning to Raleigh. Holden—seeing plainly that the man he had supported for the office of chief executive two years earlier was not going to advocate a state peace convention—announced in early March his intention to run against the incumbent in the gubernatorial race.³⁹

It was apparent to Vance that in this upcoming election, unlike the one two years earlier, he could not remain a passive candidate awaiting the call to office. This time, he and his advisers knew he had to take maximum advantage of his effective talent as a public speaker and campaign vigorously. Holden, however, declared that he would not actively campaign against Vance but would stay at home and await the outcome of the election. He argued that his platform should be obvious to the voters and pointed out that neither candidate for governor had campaigned in 1862. Nor had the gubernatorial candidates in Virginia, Alabama, and Georgia done so in the recent elections in those states. Some of Holden's supporters recognized that he was giving Vance a decided advantage by not taking to the campaign circuit, and they implored him to stump the state, but he could not be persuaded.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Vance traveled extensively in North Carolina, responding to many invitations to speak and drawing large crowds throughout the spring and summer. In March, he also campaigned among North Carolina troops in Virginia, where he

vowed that the Tar Heel State would never abandon the cause of Confederate independence. He and his newspaper mouthpiece, the Raleigh *Conservative*, clearly stated the platform on which he was running—a platform that offered something to both Conservatives and secessionists. He opposed “despotism in every form” and supported “the preservation of our Republican institutions in all their purity,” but at the same time, there could be no “reconstruction or submission.” He would not entirely rule out negotiations for peace, but he remained adamant that any negotiations with the Federal government must be based on the “perpetual independence” of the Confederacy.⁴¹

The issue of the Confederate government’s possible suspension of the legal right of habeas corpus potentially threatened Vance’s campaign. Holden was claiming that the governor supported a recent Confederate law authorizing the president to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, which some North Carolinians interpreted as a violation of their civil rights. The law, passed in February 1864, permitted President Jefferson Davis to suspend the writ in cases of desertion and defiance of the draft. It also allowed him to override habeas corpus for anyone arrested for “advising or inciting others to abandon the Confederate cause, or to resist the Confederate States, or to adhere to the enemy.”⁴² In response to Holden’s promotion of a peace convention, Davis dispatched troops under the command of General Robert F. Hoke to an encampment near Raleigh. Davis anticipated that he might have to resort to having Hoke arrest Holden under the habeas corpus law, because of his disloyal clamorings for peace negotiations. Vance, however, cautioned the president that such an action would only alienate North Carolinians further from the Confederate cause, and he urged him to await the outcome of the election. If he were elected, he told Davis, the president could count on his support, and Holden therefore would not be a threat.⁴³

In the end, Vance ran a nearly perfect campaign. He realized early that Holden would be his opponent in his bid for reelection. He also grasped that the secessionists would vote for him as an alternative to Holden, and that he did not have to concentrate on wooing them with extreme rhetoric in support of Davis and the war effort. He marshaled media support by establishing the *Conservative* in Raleigh and encouraging its editor, Hyman, and Hale, editor of the Fayetteville *Observer*, to promote him and attack Holden. He listened to his Conservative advisers and took care not to alienate the “ultra” members of the party by completely discounting any possibility of a peace convention that might hold terms favorable to the South. He also heeded Conservatives’ advice to speak more emphatically in defense of the writ of habeas corpus. By doing so, he denied Holden and his allies those issues with which to assail him. At the same time, although Vance and Jefferson Davis engaged in heated exchanges over habeas corpus and North Carolinians’ role in the war in general, his correspondence with the president did not precipitate any break with the government in Richmond. In fact, Vance’s appeal might have prevented Davis from having Holden arrested under the

provisions of the 1864 law on suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Vance canvassed the state widely during the campaign. He did not slight the importance of the army's vote and made a special effort to address North Carolina troops in the field. Finally, he effectively utilized his greatest campaigning asset, his charismatic speaking ability, to sway large crowds of voters.

Vance's campaign was assisted in the summer of 1864 by the improvement of the Confederate situation on the battlefield and by a rumored decline of support in the North for continuing the war. Tar Heel citizens heard rumors that enthusiasm for the war was waning in the Union. If Lincoln suffered defeat in the presidential election in November, Confederate independence might be a real possibility. Encouraged by such news, North Carolinians were swayed to accept Vance's call for perseverance in support of the Confederate war effort.⁴⁴

Vance thus won the August gubernatorial election overwhelmingly, receiving 77.2 percent of the civilian vote. Of the soldiers' votes, Holden garnered only 1,824 of the 15,000 cast. There is some evidence of possible fraud in some of the army voting, but this would not have changed the outcome of the election. Vance carried all but three counties in the state: Wilkes (the site of the governor's opening campaign speech), Randolph, and Johnston. His votes totaled 57,873, while Holden received only 14,432.⁴⁵

Zebulon B. Vance's gubernatorial campaigns of 1862 and 1864 differed greatly in the manner in which they were conducted. But in the end, they produced the same results—the election of a candidate who, until the Civil War's end, gave his support steadfastly to the Confederacy's efforts to win its independence.

¹ Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 100; R. Matthew Poteat, *Henry Toole Clark: Civil War Governor of North Carolina* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland and Co., 2009), 5, 70, 116-117.

² Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 231-232; William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Johnston, William."

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⁴ Joe A. Mobley, *"War Governor of the South": North Carolina's Zeb Vance in the Confederacy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 13-21.

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⁶ McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 102.

⁷ Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 233.

⁸ Mobley, *"War Governor of the South,"* 30; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 234.

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¹⁰ *Milton Chronicle*, as excerpted in the *Daily Bulletin* (Charlotte), August 11, 1862.

¹¹ *Asheville News*, July 24, 31, 1862.

¹² *Daily Bulletin*, August 8, 1862.

¹³ William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 117.

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¹⁵ McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 105, 106. The *Raleigh Register* is quoted on p. 105.

¹⁶ Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 237-238.

¹⁷ Mobley, *"War Governor of the South,"* 32.

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²² *Raleigh Register*, September 10, 1862.

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³⁹*Conservative* (Raleigh), April 16, 20, 1864; Yates, "Governor Vance and the Peace Movement," 96-97.

⁴⁰*North Carolina Standard*, March 3, April 20, 1864.

⁴¹*Conservative*, April 27, 1864.

⁴²Yates, "Governor Vance and the Peace Movement," 92-93.

⁴³Mobley, "War Governor of the South," 118.

⁴⁴Harris, *William Woods Holden*, 151.

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Presented on September 14th and 15th, 2012, the conference “To Gain Attention to Their Various Claims: Historic Political Campaigns in North Carolina” took place at Wilson Library, co-sponsored by the North Carolina Collection and the Southern Historical Collection