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PRESIDENT FORD's intention to be an accessible, "open" President, presiding over a likely government of national unity, comes as welcome news after the long winter of crime in high places and Richard Nixon's aloof and secretive ways. The change would come none too soon.

Ford inherits the presidency at a time of virtually unprecedented public distrust and alienation. Louis Harris, after a survey of public attitudes toward government, reported to a Senate subcommittee last year that the central question facing the United States is "no less than how to restore faith and confidence of a free people in their own government." The events of the last several months obviously have worsened the situation.

No President, acting alone, can en-

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tirely solve this problem. But Mr. Ford has a rare opportunity, as Lincoln put it, "to bind up the nation's wounds." Not only do the times require that he assume that role, but he seems peculiarly well suited to do so. What the country most needs now in the presidency is not dashing leadership and "overpromise" but modesty and candor, not crafty public relations techniques but a willingness to acknowledge mistakes and try again, not a towering intellect but a man of compromise and negotiation.

These traits are not at the top of textbook lists of presidential attributes. But they may be tailor-made for a nation in post-Nixonian shock. Ford's problem is how to take advantage of these characteristics, which are his by nature, in a way that reduces alienation and calms the nation.

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