

Ford Facing Election-Year

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Gerald R. Ford, whose ideological leanings are at least as conservative as the man he succeeds, will assume office facing two distinct agendas of unfinished business.

The first is a backlog of election-year legislation which Congress unexpectedly has several extra weeks to consider, and which the White House for the first time in many months can expect to influence. Despite the better survival odds Republican candidates may enjoy because of Gerald Ford's ascendancy, incumbents of both parties still fear a strong voter backlash and are eager to take something back to their constituents.

The other is the list of reforms designed to prevent another Watergate. And one of the very first bills to reach Ford's desk as President will be campaign reform legislation, which is expected to emerge from House-Senate conference containing public finance provisions President Nixon had threatened to veto.

While Ford's approach to most pending legislation is predictable from his

25-year House voting record, it is not at all clear what form his conservatism will take regarding broad post-Watergate reforms.

There are a multitude of proposals for sweeping reform offered by the Senate Watergate committee, Common Cause, and others. These include public campaign financing, a permanent special prosecutor, expansion of the Freedom of Information Act, tighter registration of lobbyists, greater insulation of police and tax agencies from White House control, limitations on bugging and a variety of other ideas.

There is little doubt from Ford's voting record that his approach to most issues approximates that of President Nixon. During 1973, Congressman Ford voted with the administration on 80 per cent of the issues on which Mr. Nixon had expressed a position.

On one major issue, mass transit, Ford's position was to the right of the White House. He opposed opening the Highway Trust Fund to mass transit.

The House has rejected a one-year mass transit bill but \$20 billion, six-year measure is expected to reach the

House floor next week. The Nixon administration had endorsed a similar formula but with a lower price tag.

Other measures pending in Congress which may have a better chance of passage this year, thanks to the new legislative calendar, include tax reform, national health insurance, foreign trade and no-fault auto insurance.

Supporters of the strip-mine control bill say the extra legislative time increases the chance of ironing out the differences in House-Senate conference and getting final passage.

But that is another measure the Nixon White House found too sweeping and threatened to veto.

So is the long-delayed consumer protection bill, which opponents have been filibustering on the Senate floor. Supporters say they now have more time to get a cloture vote. But that bill was also threatened with a Nixon veto, and Ford's position is unknown.

Most legislators contacted yesterday were still too wrapped up in the final suspense of the resignation drama to even speculate about Ford's effect on pending congressional business.

There was general agreement, how-

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ever, on several points. Ford, as a skilled legislator accustomed to the arts of legislative compromise, is likely to fill quickly the vacuum which developed during the White House preoccupation with Watergate.

And if, as some liberals charged, some legislation was sidetracked because the White House position was dictated by impeachment politics, there will no longer be that impediment.

But on most long-standing policy issues, the White House position is unlikely to change.

Congressman Ford opposed most of the Great Society programs of the 1960s, including Medicare, the poverty program, and even federal aid to education. He has criticized expanded federal spending, except in the area of defense. He advocated revenue-sharing even before it became part of the Republican platform, and he remains firmly committed to the concept.

As a congressman, he voted for most civil rights legislations on final passage, although he voted for weakening amendments. He opposed legislation restricting the President's right to im-

pound funds and conduct undeclared wars without congressional consent.

It has been widely remarked, however, that Ford's conservatism will take a form different from Mr. Nixon's.

President Nixon, who considers himself an ideological conservative, did decentralize a measure of power from Washington to the states, but he increased the power of the federal executive at the expense of Congress. In mounting his Watergate defense, Mr. Nixon was driven even further into an incongruous embrace of the executive power that he formerly criticized.

Most of those who know Ford say his temperament, coupled with the post-Watergate resurgence of congressional authority, will lead him to run an administration that consults and compromises with Congress.

Many on Capitol Hill are wondering whether Ford will ask the country to unite behind some of the reforms recommended by the Senate Watergate committee and other as necessary to prevent further Watergate.

Some of these proposed reforms are not yet in legislative form, because it

had been widely expected that impeachment would leave no time to consider them.

Others, like public finance, were opposed by the Nixon White House and many congressmen. Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.) is conducting a mini-filibuster in hopes of restoring his amendment prohibiting White House access to tax returns. According to Weicker, administration lobbyists "swarmed" onto Capitol Hill last week to knock the amendment out of a conference report.

Justice Department aides had also threatened a presidential veto of a long-pending bill to expand the Freedom of Information Act, also in Conference.

Ford could lead a campaign for these and other reforms, or with almost equal credibility he could maintain that the disgrace of Richard Nixon, the Watergate catharsis, and the transfer of power to a president long identified as a congressional man are reform enough. Certainly, no one expects Ford to conduct a regal, isolated presidency.