

'Welcome to the White House'

I have never talked to Gerald Ford about anything more political than the upbringing of children (he has had problems, too), the differences in pipe tobaccos (he favors Sir Walter Raleigh) and the quarterbacking of Harry Newman (a boyhood hero to me, a contemporary to Ford).

This being so, I am in no position to predict what Mr. Ford will do about the economy or foreign policy or any of the other problems which must now be gathering in his mind's eye like swiftly moving storm clouds.

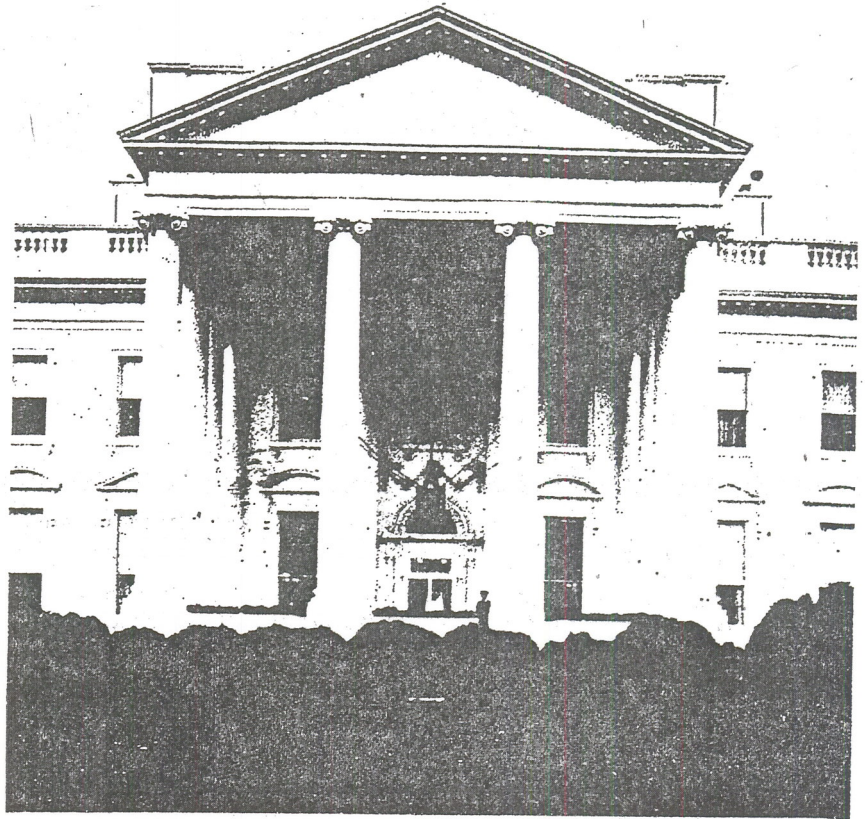
But before he does anything about these problems—and therefore before he begins to draw criticism—I'd like to go on record as saying that I don't know a nicer guy to talk to, or one I'd rather have as a next-door neighbor, or one I'd rather lend a hand to, say, if his car were stuck in the snow or he needed a hand chopping down a tree.

That quality of open, honest independence about Mr. Ford comes straight out of the American small town, and all the heralded values of the small town are there—including, very likely, the earnest belief that real-estate values will go up. Moreover, Mr. Ford is unspoiled. The man looks a little like Dwight Eisenhower, but by the time Eisenhower reached the presidency he had grown accustomed to the favors of the rich and the adulation of the crowds.

Not so with Mr. Ford. He comes to us in pristine straightness. One can no more imagine him accepting substantial gifts as Eisenhower did than one can imagine him sitting in the White House planning how to misuse independent agencies to his own advantage as Nixon did.

He has been compared to Harry Truman. The comparison seems to me fair, though I would guess that he will show us less temper than Truman and I worry about whether he will demonstrate as much breadth, as much capacity to weigh contrary opinions.

The worry is suggested by the one great mistake of Mr. Ford's legislative career, the silly, laughable but nevertheless narrow, partisan and rather



tawdry attempt to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

There was no case for impeaching Douglas, as every lawyer or legislator who looked into it recognized at once. Ford nevertheless earnestly plodded ahead, trying to make lecture fees and magazine articles sound like high crimes and misdemeanors by citing the records of those who paid the lecture fees or the taste of those who published the magazines.

Mr. Ford became, after a while, the laughing-stock of his colleagues, who would tell reporters, "Oh, that's just Jerry doing his chore." And to this day, Justice Douglas bears him no ill will, having determined long ago that then-Rep. Ford was carrying out a mission for President Nixon and had no real conviction that Douglas was guilty

of anything and no real animosity toward him.

Nevertheless, it is not a proud chapter in the Ford biography. One hopes that he regrets it, even as one is forced to wonder about the judgment of a man who could carry on so ponderously and so righteously such a flimsy case.

Let's put it down as an aberration, still another example of misplaced loyalty to Richard Nixon.

That way, we can say, "Welcome to the White House Mr. and Mrs. Ford, it's a pleasure—after 20 years—to have somebody occupy the place who makes each one of us feel as though he might, if suddenly pressed, send one of the kids to the back door to say, 'Mom wants to borrow a cup of sugar.'"