

David S. Broder

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# Mr. Ford's First 100 Days

After 100 days in the presidency, Gerald R. Ford is still very much the man of Congress. Those who have seen him come away impressed, not with the changes the White House has brought in the man, but in the constancy of his method and manner and character.

He works hard, sleeps easy, stays in shape, enjoys his family, and is quick to express unaffected dissatisfaction with his own rhetoric on the economic program, for example, as he is to voice his disappointment with the Democrats' response—or lack of response.

The useful qualities he has displayed in the job of President are the same he showed as a Michigan congressman and as Minority Leader. He is relaxed but conscientious. He organizes his time well, but is not so rigid he refuses to bend the schedule to accommodate a request—from his wife, from a friend or even from a political rival.

Like any successful congressional politician, he puts great stock in keeping his commitments. That is really why he is going to the Far East next week, despite the arguments of many associates that a visit to Japan and South Korea is untimely or unwise or hazardous. The commitment for a presidential visit was made for reasons that seemed good and valid at the time to Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, and Jerry Ford is not one to back out of a commitment.

He also has the good congressman's view that personal relationships are key to successful handling of issues. He regards his first meeting with Soviet party chairman Leonid Brezhnev as vitally important, not because of the substantive business they will do, but because he needs to know the man before they can negotiate successfully together.

The possibility that they might meet as strangers next year in Washington and conclude any important agreement on strategic arms control is literally unthinkable to Jerry Ford.

Equally unthinkable to him is the suggestion that he should clean out most of the holdovers in the Nixon Cabinet, just because they are symbols of an administration that has lost its political and moral credibility. That vi-

olates the new President's sense of fair play, and he has told the Cabinet members they will be judged solely on the basis of their performance: if they do a good job, they have nothing to worry about.

At times this modesty, fair-mindedness and reluctance to throw his weight around seems almost otherworldly, even to a few of the President's advisers. People less cynical than Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) see the Boy Scout quality that Dole talked about in Mr. Ford.

He is surely the simplest man to occupy the White House in modern times, but the times are not simple. And after 100 days, there is still a question whether Mr. Ford can develop a method of presidential leadership that suits both his character and the national situation.

He seems, in certain ways, almost reluctant to acknowledge his altered circumstances, expressing astonishment, for example, that Cabinet members might tell reporters their misgivings about the timing of his Far Eastern trip when they have not voiced those same reservations to the President himself.

On the other hand, he has discovered already that a President cannot fuzzle decisions the way a skillful congressman can by taking opposite sides on succeeding roll-calls. And he knows already that, for all the advice he gets, the responsibility of decision-making is ultimately and uniquely his.

What he has not yet discovered is how to convey to the Democrats who control Congress or to the voters who elected them what it is that he perceives about the toughness of the problems and the choices facing this country.

He does not draw back from tough decisions himself. He personally chose from a list of 150 possible program cut-backs those he will submit to Congress on Nov. 20 in order to reduce the budget below \$300 billion—knowing full-well they will bring howls of pain and rage.

He is going to veto some spending bills that are both popular and humane, and he is prepared to take the heat for it.

Down the line, he can see the possibility that he may have to order mandatory steps for curbing energy use in this country—including a 1 million barrel a day reduction in oil imports. He may, he fears, have to set America's policy in a new Middle East war.

When visitors tell him that the American people are ahead of the congressional politicians; that they know there are tough problems and hunger for strong leadership to meet them, Jerry Ford says he agrees, and that his instinct is to call on people for sacrifice.

But, in the same breath, the congressional politician in him warns that Congress and the people don't like to be lectured; that jawboning is effective only if rarely used; that compromise is preferable to stark confrontation—even confrontation with reality.

That is Jerry Ford after the presidency has had 100 days to work its chemistry on him.