

Historic Speech

NIXON

RESIGNS

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 1974

Ford to Be Sworn In As President Today

*'Leadership of America
Will Be in Good Hands,'
Nixon Tells the Nation*

Washington

Richard Milhous Nixon announced his resignation last night as President of the United States, the first chief executive to resign in the Republic's 198-year history.

Gerald Rudolph Ford, vice president since Dec. 7, 1973, will take the oath of office at noon today to become the nation's 38th President, the first ever to take office without having been elected by the people to either the presidency or vice presidency.

In a 15-minute television speech to the nation, Mr. Nixon, his face drawn and expression somber, said he no longer had "a strong enough political base in the Congress" to warrant continuing his fight against impeachment.

Mr. Nixon, who faced certain conviction in the Senate had he continued to fight, said he was leaving the presidency today in "sadness" but with satisfaction that with Ford as the new President "leadership in America will be in good hands."

The President said he had "never been a quitter" and that resigning was "abhorrent to every instinct of my body."

But to have continued the fight, he said, would have "totally absorbed" his time during the months ahead when the nation would need "a full-time President."

Mr. Nixon stopped short of acknowledging any guilt in the Watergate coverup, a principal charge

against him in the impeachment proceedings, but admitted that he had made mistakes in the handling of the Watergate scandal.

By resigning, Mr. Nixon said, "I hope that I will have hastened the start of that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America. I regret deeply any injuries that may have been done in the course of the events that led to this decision. I would say only that if some of my judgments were wrong — and some were wrong — they were made in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation.

Wearing an American flag pin in his lapel as he always does, the 61-year-old President read slowly and deliberately from his prepared speech, occasionally glancing up with a faint smile as he spoke of his hopes that the nation would unite behind Ford and continue to strive for the goals of peace and international understanding fostered by the Nixon administration.

He noted that his family—a dejected group that took his decision hard and remained secluded—had unimously opposed his resignation. But he said he thought the best interests of the nation demanded it.

He expressed gratitude to those who had stood by him during his long ordeal and added, "I leave with no bitterness toward those who have opposed me."

In tone and content, Mr. Nixon's address was in sharp contrast to his frequently combative language of the past, especially his first "farewell" appearance—that of 1962 when he announced he was retiring from politics after losing the California governor's race and said the media would not have "Nixon to kick around" anymore.

Speaking of his accomplishments in ending American involvement in the Vietnam War and in helping settle the Mideast War, he said he was confident that

Back Page Col. 5

Top of the News on Page 20

From Page 1

he had helped make the world a safer place to live and added that he would continue working for peace the rest of his life.

He concluded his last message as President to the American people with a prayer:

"May God's grace be with you in all the days ahead."

Mr. Nixon, who had repeatedly vowed not to resign despite the proliferating scandals that engulfed him and his administration, plans to fly to San Clemente today in a final trip as President aboard Air Force One.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the presidential adviser and press secretary, said Mr. Nixon's letter of resignation would be delivered to the office of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger by noon today.

Ford was selected by Mr. Nixon to be the nation's 40th vice president after Spiro T. Agnew agreed to plead no contest to an income tax evasion charge and resigned in disgrace on Oct. 10, 1973.

When Ford's choice for vice president is sworn in, the nation's two top officials for the first time will have been appointed rather than elected.

Mr. Nixon's announcement last night came only two days after he told his cabinet that he would not resign but would let the constitutional impeachment process run its course, even though it was evident he would be removed from office after a senate trial.

But in the next 48 hours the pressures for him to resign and turn the reins of government over to Ford

became overwhelming.

Seventeen months of almost constant disclosures of Watergate and related scandals had brought a steady attrition of support, in the country and in Con-

More Nixon news Pages 2 through 5D

gress, for what many authorities believed was the most powerful presidency in the history of the nation.

However, a presidential statement of last Monday and three transcripts of presidential conversations that Mr. Nixon chose to make public ultimately precipitated the rush of events of the last week.

In that statement, Mr. Nixon admitted, as the transcripts showed, that he had ordered on June 23 a halt to the investigation of the break-in at the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate complex six days earlier by persons in the employ of agents of Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign. He also admitted that he had kept the evidence from both his lawyers and the House Judiciary Committee, which had recommended that the House impeach him on three general charges.

Then came the avalanche. Republicans, southern said the these actions constituted the evidence needed to support the articles of impeachment approved by the House Judiciary Committee, charging obstruction of justice. AND it gave new support to other charges that Mr. Nixon had widely abused his office by bringing undue presidential pressure to bear on sensitive government agencies.

As the pressures mounted and Mr. Nixon held publicly to his resolve not to resign, the capital was thrown into a turmoil.

At the White House Wednesday, Mr. Nixon met with Mrs. Nixon and his two daughters, and with his close aides. Members of his staff sent him memos he had requested, as to their recommendations. Most called for resignation rather than taking the country through a painful impeachment debate and vote in the House and a trial in the Senate.

Wednesday night, Raymond K. Price and other speechwriters were ordered to prepare a resignation statement. Secretary of State Kissinger met with the President late in the evening and Mr. Nixon told him that he would resign in the national interest.

At 11 a.m. yesterday, as crowds for the third day gathered along Pennsylvania avenue outside the White House, Mr. Nixon summoned Ford to his Oval Office and officially informed him that he would announce his resignation.

Shortly after noon, Ziegler, his face saddened and weary, appeared in the crowded White House press room and announced that the President would go on national radio and television to address the American people.

It was exactly six years ago last night that Mr. Nixon was nominated on the first ballot at the Republican National Convention to be the party's nominee for President.

That evening marked the beginning of an ascension to power that was to put the Nixon mark on an important segment of American history. After a first term marked by innovations in foreign policy and a return of resources to the state and local governments in domestic policy, Mr. Nixon in 1972 won re-election with 60.7 per cent of the vote.

In early 1973, as he ended U.S. military involve-

ment in the Vietnam war and as he moved to strengthen the powers of his office in a multitude of ways, his popularity rating in the Gallup poll registered 68 per cent. But, as the Watergate disclosures broke, his rating dropped quickly and was below 30 per cent before the end of the year.

Mr. Nixon made a number of counterattacks to win back his lost popularity. He campaigned from time to time across the country as if he were running for office. He disclosed information about his taxes and property. He hired a succession of lawyers to defend him in the courts and in Congress.

He made television and radio appearances. He ordered his subordinates to step up their activities to show that government business was moving ahead. He made foreign trips to show he was still a world leader. In the Middle East in June, he was cheered by vast throngs. And he held a summit meeting with Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev in Moscow.

Yet, when he returned to the United States, the Gallup poll showed his rating at 24 per cent and the Watergate charges broke anew as the House Judiciary Committee stepped up its impeachment inquiry.

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