

Nixon's Last Hours In Office

By Saul Pett
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The days, now the moments, were dwindling down to a precious few.

Wednesday night Richard Nixon gathered his family for dinner on the second floor of the White House. Before going in, they talked quietly. At various times, all three women, the President's wife and two daughters, came to tears.

Pat Nixon, who had come all the way with her husband on the ladder of history, this far and now no farther, was said to be the most composed. At one point, the President hugged his daughter Julie, who, it was said, had been trying hardest among members of the family to dissuade her father from resigning.

As father and daughter embraced, Tricia Nixon Cox, wept without control.

At 11:02 a.m. yesterday, the 37th President of the United States met with Gerald R. Ford, who is now on the threshold of becoming the 38th.

Some moments later, the President's pool of typists who normally handle his correspondence were told they would soon end their operations.

At 12:23 p.m., Ronald Ziegler came to the microphone in the press room of the White House — a somber, pale Ronald Ziegler, who two years ago sought to dismiss Watergate as a "third rate burglary."

"Tonight at 9:00 o'clock, eastern daylight time," said the press secre-

tary in a sepulchral voice, "the President of the United States will address the nation on radio and television from his Oval Office."

With that, the last of Richard Nixon's original confidantes who came with him to the pinnacle of power 2026 days ago, turned abruptly and left the silent room. Nothing more was said.

In his office, Deputy Press Secretary Gerald Warren, who has borne the brunt of reporters' questions through two years of Watergate, tried to talk to a newsman. He couldn't. He shook his head, side to side, a man trying to calculate the sum of 2026 days. On the edge of tears, he asked to be left alone.

At 12:43, a voice from the press office announced on the P.A. system: "We are posting a number of bill signings, resignations, appointments and nominations."

There were routine announcements of changes among federal judges, the Atomic Energy Commission, the National Science Foundation, the Combined Federal Campaign for the National Capital Area, the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission.

The Presidency of Richard Nixon was grinding down in small detail. One of his last appointments was that of a delegation of "personal representatives" of the President to attend the inauguration of the new president of the Dominican Republic. These ceremonies begin next Monday, when the United States would have a new President.