

Ford Assumes Presidency Today

By Jules Witcover
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Gerald R. Ford Jr., a Grand Rapids, Mich., lawyer who never aspired to national office but had it thrust upon him as a result of two of the greatest political scandals in American history, will become the 38th President of the United States today.

He will be the first American President not elected to national office by the people, having been nominated Vice President by President Nixon last Oct. 12 under provisions of the new 25th Amendment to the Constitution.

The swearing in is to take place either in the Rose Garden, if the weather is good, or in the Oval Office if it is not, sources said last night. In either case, the ceremony will be televised.

President Nixon is not expected to attend the ceremony. Sources said he will already have resigned effective noon and will be on his way with his family to his home in San Clemente.

In the East Room nearly 10 months ago, Mr. Nixon announced his choice of Ford to succeed the resigned Spiro T. Agnew, to the cheering and applauding approval of assembled Republican leaders.

The Agnew scandal, in which the then Vice President resigned before pleading *nolo contendere* to a charge of federal income tax evasion, put Ford in the line of succession to the presidency. The Watergate scandal, which culminated last night in President Nixon's announcement that he will resign today, has propelled Ford into the White House.

There were reports that the chief justice of the United States, Warren E. Burger, vacationing in Europe, would return to administer the oath of office to Ford.

Sources said the new President is planning to make a brief address to the nation immediately following the swearing in, and to address a joint session of Congress, where he served for 25 years, next Monday or Tuesday.

Ford is expected to ask all members of the Nixon Cabinet to stay on for a time, as well as most White House aides, but associates said yesterday he will move swiftly to enlarge his own staff and integrate it with the hold-overs.

According to associates, he will also call for national unity to enhance the prospects of a smooth and orderly transition of power, will praise Mr. Nixon for stepping aside to enable such a transition to take place, and will call on Americans to maintain confidence in their country.

One of the first major tasks he faces is the nomination of a new Vice President under the same 25th Amendment through which he entered the line of succession.

Sources close to Ford said yesterday he is likely to take some time—from several days to a week or more—in making his nomination, which must be confirmed by the House and Senate.

"He's not going to move quickly," one associate said. "He's going to move as quickly as he can, responsibly. He'll get a lot of input from party leaders and friends, and the list will grow before it shrinks. He knows more than most the man he picks may become the next President of the United States."

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FORD, From A1

The final events that thrust the presidency on Ford, climaxed by President Nixon's announcement last night, began to unfold yesterday morning.

The Vice President arrived at his Executive Office Building suite shortly before 8 a.m., conferred with staff aides, met with some White House interns and received his daily intelligence briefing from his military aide. Then he attended a ceremony at Blair House just across Pennsylvania Avenue at which he presented medals of honor posthumously to the families of seven Americans

killed in Vietnam.

Spectators along Pennsylvania Avenue cheered and applauded when they saw the Vice President. He smiled and waved but said nothing. A traffic jam resulted when Ford's limousine, Secret Service cars and military vehicles blocked one lane.

Shortly after he returned to his second-floor office, a call came from the White House for him to see the President in the Oval Office, about 11 a.m.

Ford walked across the narrow, closed-off street that separates the EOB from the West Wing of the White House and spent 70 minutes with Mr. Nixon in his office, during which the President told him of his decision to resign.

The Vice President returned to his office and immediately phoned Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger to come by later in the afternoon.

Ford has already said that if he became President he would ask Kissinger to stay on. He has said publicly he regards him among the greatest American secretaries of State and Kissinger's continuation would add considerable stability to the new Ford administration. Kissinger has indicated he will stay.

After having lunch at his desk, the Vice President called in about 20 key staff aides and, according to assistant press secretary Bill Roberts, "asked them to be patient and thanked them for the long hours they have worked." He indicated they would be kept on as he moved into the White House in "a smooth and orderly transition."

At 3 p.m., Kissinger came into the EOB office and after about 15 minutes of picture-taking by news photographers, the Secretary of State and the Vice President conferred for nearly two hours.

Paul Miltich, Ford's press secretary, said: "They reviewed the world situation and discussed the foreign policy of the United States for the past five years. After the meeting, the Vice President noted he had enjoyed working with Kissinger and has supported the foreign policy carried out by Kissinger. He said he believes that policy is in the best interest of the United States."

A Ford spokesman said the Vice President planned to watch the President's television speech from his Alexandria home and newsmen and photographers were told they would be barred.

Ford's day started with his staff still insisting he would go ahead with a long-planned 12-day trip to California, the Pacific Northwest and Hawaii, during which he was to speak at a series of fund-raising lunches and dinners for Republican congressional candidates.

He was to have kicked off the tour by appearing on a regional telethon in Los Angeles last night, but it was canceled on grounds a number of prominent Republican leaders would be unable to attend, due to the crisis in Washington.

At first Ford's press office told newsmen who were to make the trip that the original noon takeoff time had been pushed back to 3 p.m., and then to late last night or early today. It was nearly noon before Ford aides acknowledged that the trip had been canceled.

Ford associates said yesterday the building of his own White House staff would be a first order of business. Among those likely to be asked to come aboard, at least on interim basis, are Melvin R. Laird, former Rep. John Brynes of Wisconsin, former congressman and Nixon congressional liaison aide Clark MacGregor and former

Sen. Charles E. Goodell of New York, all Ford friends during mutual service in the House.

But one Ford friend who has been involved in contingency planning this week for the Ford administration said he expected the staff to be clearly subordinate, with no one or two men emerging as super-aides.

"It don't think there are going to be any Haldemans or Ehrlichmans around Jerry," he said.

Also, this associate predicted, Ford as President will be much less peripatetic than his predecessor.

"I'm not at all sure Jerry will set up a summer or winter White House," he said. "It's more likely he'll set up vacations and use the White House and Camp David more."

Ford's family vacations annually in Colorado, where they ski, he noted. "It'll be kind of fun seeing the Secret Service skiing down the slopes with him," he said.

Ford has had good personal relations with the press both as House Republican leader and as Vice President, has held frequent press conferences.

During his Senate confirmation hearings to be Vice President, he said categorically he would hold regular press conferences if he were to become President—a custom that died in the Nixon years.

Through yesterday's momentous developments, Ford was pictured by staff aides as calm and confident as he approached the responsibility he had not sought.

"I think he feels no trepidation," one old associate, who spoke to him Wednesday, said. "He feels confident of being capable to do the job."