

President Ford: A Return to Old Virtues...

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"I DO HAVE SOME old-fashioned ideas," President Ford told the joint session of Congress in his address Monday night. "I believe in the basic decency and fairness of America. I believe in the integrity and patriotism of the Congress . . . I believe in the First Amendment . . ." The thing about these "old-fashioned ideas" is that they didn't *used* to be old fashioned, if you see what we mean. In fact, they only went out of style relatively recently in official Washington and—as measured against the sweep of history—for a relatively brief period of time. We suspect we are expressing the view of millions of others when we say that it is profoundly gratifying to have such ideas pronounced back in fashion.

It is a measure of the quality and impact of the national "nightmare" to which the President referred in his East Room remarks last Friday, that the public can take such reassurance from Mr. Ford's own reaffirmation of elementary truths and simple promises. Honesty, he said in his inaugural remarks, is the best policy. "Let us restore the golden rule," he went on to say. This past Monday evening, the President again elicited a thunderous response by personally pledging that which people had once merely taken for granted: "There will be no illegal tappings, eavesdropping, buggings or break-ins by my administration."

Theoretically, of course, it is possible to argue that for all the strain and singularity that marked the circumstances under which Mr. Ford took office, he has had it comparatively easy, since he can evoke a great and friendly national response simply by taking these unexceptionable positions on the way people should behave. But we would contend that it has not been so easy for him to take this course in the past few days and that it was not self-evident that he would. For in a casual and unpretentious way, the new President has been quite

singleminded and relentless in calling attention to the squalid circumstances that ultimately brought him to office. It is no trick, after all, to imagine a couple of speeches Mr. Ford might have given instead of those he did—speeches in which he could have glossed over the past, paid soupy and sorrowful tribute to his predecessor in office and concentrated on the future in a way that would somehow excise our painful recent past from memory.

But Mr. Ford has chosen not to do so. Conceivably it was Richard Nixon's failure to acknowledge the Watergate reality that compelled Gerald Ford to do it for him. By indirection and by a contrast of manner and style, Mr. Ford has managed in the past several days to make an official record, from the office of the presidency, that takes note of what went so disastrously wrong and that carries a commitment not to repeat or tolerate such behavior in the future. When you think back on the White House transcripts that were published this spring, there is an ugly but instructive irony here. For page after page of those dismal documents was devoted to a cynical White House search for what would "play in Peoria"—for music it was assumed the public wanted to hear. Mr. Ford, self-evidently unencumbered with the baggage of "modified limited hang-out routes" and the rest when it comes to his dealings with the public, clearly *knew* what Americans wanted to hear. They wanted to hear, from the highest level of our government, an acknowledgement of what had happened and a pledge that it would not happen again. Mr. Ford has given it. And he has said, "I want to be a good President." Policy and program are only part of that, an important part but one that rests on a bedrock of mutual respect, confidence and fair-dealing between the government and the governed. Mr. Ford, in his first days in office, has demonstrated that he understands this well.