

Ford: A Very Human President

By Jack Anderson

Behind the broad shoulders, square jaw and ruggedly handsome features, what is President Gerald Ford really like?

We have checked with congressional sleuths, who in preparation for Ford's vice presidential confirmation hearings earlier this year, gave him the most thorough investigation of any man who has ever assumed the office. We have talked privately with some of his most intimate friends. We have obtained access to the confidential audit of his tax returns.

From these sources, we have put together a portrait of an intensely human President, basically decent, inherently honest, without guile, who still would like his friends to call him "Jerry."

He uses expletives that would be deleted from White House transcripts, but he never would pretend he didn't. His profanity is good-natured, not vicious characterizations of his enemies.

When Ford first learned about the Nixon "enemies list," he remarked in disbelief: "If you have so many enemies you have to keep a list, you are in trouble."

Nor have his friends ever heard him, even in his most relaxed moments, let an ethnic slur slip by. He has often voted against the economic interests of blacks. He first opposed but later supported civil rights leg-

islation. When the black congressional caucus opposed his confirmation as Vice President, Ford was hurt.

"You would think they would know me better," he told a friend sadly.

Another friend recalls watching a TV newscast with Ford when the cameras focused on an impoverished black family being evicted from their home in Mississippi. Ford jumped up in agitation.

"What a shame! What a shame!" he exclaimed. "A country this rich can do better."

The new President has a robust sense of humor and enjoys locker-room jokes. In the back-rooms, he has the loose masculine manner of the football star he once was.

He has an occasional drink and doesn't try to hide the fact. For his thirsty friends, he mixes the drinks himself and never summons an aide to wait on him.

A visitor caught him in shirt sleeves helping to pack the crates when he moved from his congressional office to the vice presidential quarters. The visitor, not recognizing the muscular Ford, mistook him to be the chief of the moving crew.

Afterward, a friend asked him why he didn't let his staff handle the packing. "Oh," shrugged Ford, "this is the kind of thing I can do."

After he was appointed Vice President, we phoned him at his modest Alexandria, Va., home, and got a man's voice on the

other end. It was Ford still answering his own telephone.

The President instinctively likes people and is concerned about them. He tied up a friend for long hours helping him with vice presidential arrangements. The friend's exasperated wife finally complained that he might as well not bother to come home but stay at the Ford's. Gerald Ford picked up the phone and apologized to her. "I just couldn't have gotten by without him," said Ford about her husband. She was flustered but mollified.

At a small social gathering, another friend recalls, the men were talking about world affairs, and the women were discussing the problems of the handicapped. The compassionate Ford shifted his attention to the women's conversation.

As Washington watchdogs, we have had occasion to check into reports that Ford has misused campaign money. We discovered on the contrary that he has always refused to accept cash contributions. He has insisted upon checks, which can be properly recorded. We never found the slightest evidence that he ever diverted a dime for his personal use.

The audit of his tax returns confirmed our findings. Once he mistakenly spent \$1,167 in political funds for a family trip to their condominium in the Vail, Colo., ski country. The moment he discovered the bookkeeping mistake, he immediately reim-

bursed the political account.

The IRS also disallowed an \$871.44 deduction Ford had taken for the special clothing he purchased for the 1972 Republican convention. The IRS ruled the new suits were not "unique or distinctive" in character and, therefore, leveled a \$4355.77 tax deficiency against Ford.

Ford's lawyers assured him he was entitled to the deduction and could defeat the IRS in tax court. Nevertheless, Ford insisted upon giving the government the benefit of any doubt and ordered his accountant to write the IRS a check.

Ford's returns show he earned a total income of \$224,364.10 for the first three years of the 1970s. He paid \$75,111.44, or about a third of his income, in federal taxes. An additional \$6,261.42 was paid to Michigan in state taxes.

The FBI investigation of Ford before his confirmation as Vice President was so thorough, he was told, that agents even questioned a high school football player who allegedly had been kneed by Ford in a tough-fought game. The referees threw Ford out of the game over the incident. As Ford was later told, his former football rival confirmed Ford had been ejected from the game but confessed that Ford had never actually kneed him.

Ford told friends he was pleased the FBI had been so thorough.

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