

The First Inaugural: He Meant It

By John K. Andrews Jr.

WASHINGTON — With speculation about the nature and content of President Nixon's second Inaugural Address already rife along the Potomac, some retrospection on his first seems in order.

Literary appraisals of the President's speech at his swearing-in four years ago remain strictly *de gustibus*; but the straightforwardness of that speech in stating his intentions, and its accuracy in predicting the history that has followed, are now a matter of plain fact. Lay the record of Mr. Nixon's first term alongside the rhetoric of his first Inaugural, and you see a point-for-point correspondence between the two that is rather startling in an era when so much of our public discourse has become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

Re-reading the speech, the sensation of unlikely prophecies come true is most dramatic in the realm of foreign affairs.

He called for "a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation"; the opening to China followed.

In U.S.-Soviet relations, he foreshadowed the strategic arms limitation agreements, the joint space ventures, the health and environment efforts for "enriching the life of man," the mushrooming trade that will help "lift up the poor and the hungry." But in the next breath he gave ample warning to those visionaries who were so shocked last June when continuing U.S. defense needs were outlined in the wake of SALT I: "We will be as strong as we need to be for as long as we need to be."

He said the era of negotiation was coming, and come it has—not only among the great powers but between the Germans, the Koreans, Israel and the Arabs, India and Pakistan, and the blocs in Europe as well.

He said America's wealth could be transferred from war abroad to urgent needs at home; since then defense is down from nearly half the budget dollar to under one-third, with human resources up from less than a third to almost half.

He specified the kind of peace we must seek—peace with the chance for each people to choose their own destiny, peace with compassion for those who have suffered, peace with understanding for old opponents. Then he proceeded to hold out against odds for just those specifications in Vietnam, and to obtain a resounding endorsement for them at the polls last November, and now to get them very nearly agreed to in Paris.

Domestically too, as hindsight on Mr. Nixon's First reveals, all the signals were there. "The essence of freedom is that each of us shares in the shaping of his own destiny" became revenue sharing to revive state and local government, and Federal reorganization to replace bureaucracy with democracy in Washington. "We are approaching the limits of what government alone can do" became the tough-minded concern for a tax-burdened citizenry and the fiscal restraint which insists that one-quarter of a trillion dollars for 1973 is enough. "The way to fulfillment is in the use of our talents" heralded the work ethic theme and the welfare reform proposals that lay ahead.

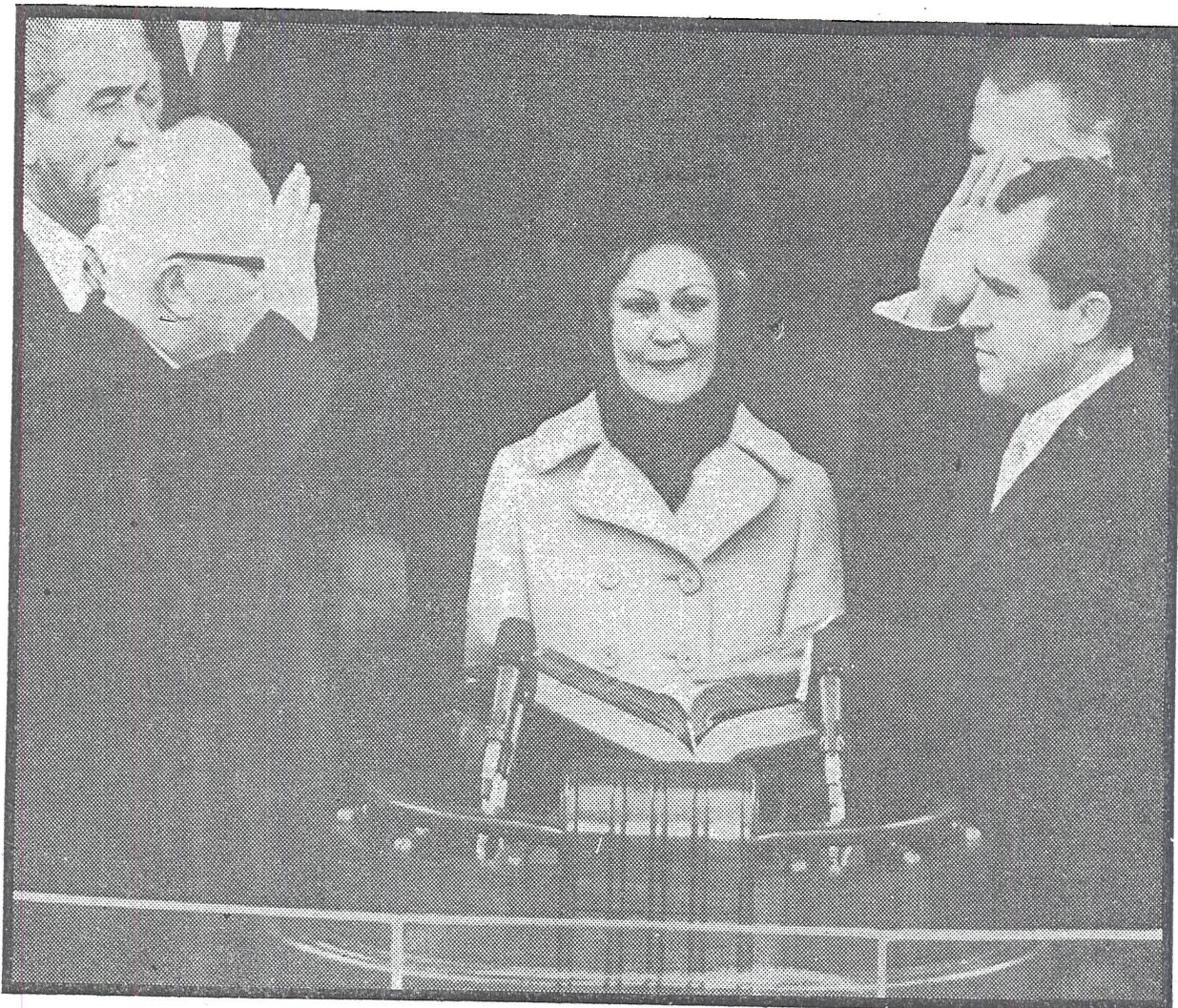
In the new President's call for answers of the spirit to remedy a crisis of the spirit lay the seeds of his continuing drive against permissiveness, and in his pledge to give life to the laws on equal justice lay the seeds of eight-fold budget increases for civil rights, of new powers for the E.E.O.C., of minority enterprise, of the Philadelphia Plan, of record minority participation in his Administration.

Not even the embrace of Keynesian economics and the resort to wage and price controls need have come as such a surprise—for this President, after all,

even before he is a Republican, is a pragmatic man of action who could say flatly at his inauguration that "we have learned at last to manage a modern economy"—not just *they*, the Democrats and liberals, but *we*.

The catch phrase by which the speech will perhaps be longest remembered is the President's appeal for Americans to "lower our voices." He did so himself that day, setting the example, and what he called the fever of words has abated steadily since then. Now the delirium wherein everything our leaders said was presumed empty or at best suspect is *past*. No doubt the time when every public man's word is his bond is still a good way off; but if President Nixon keeps giving speeches that stand up as sturdily with the passing of time as his first Inaugural does, he may yet succeed in putting our debased language back on the face value standard.

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