

SFChronicle
Vice President

Ford--'He's Got Character Not Charisma'

Washington

The more they thought about Jerry Ford, the more they thought of him.

He defied the percentages.

Usually, when a public figure submits himself to relentless scrutiny, it invari-

bly diminishes him. Long-buried skeletons pop out of closets, old embarrassing speeches come back to haunt him.

But Gerald R. Ford Jr., a plain man of notable brawn and comfortable familiarity, actually grew in personal stature as he moved methodically through the investigations and hearings which ended yesterday with his confirmation as the nation's 40th vice president.

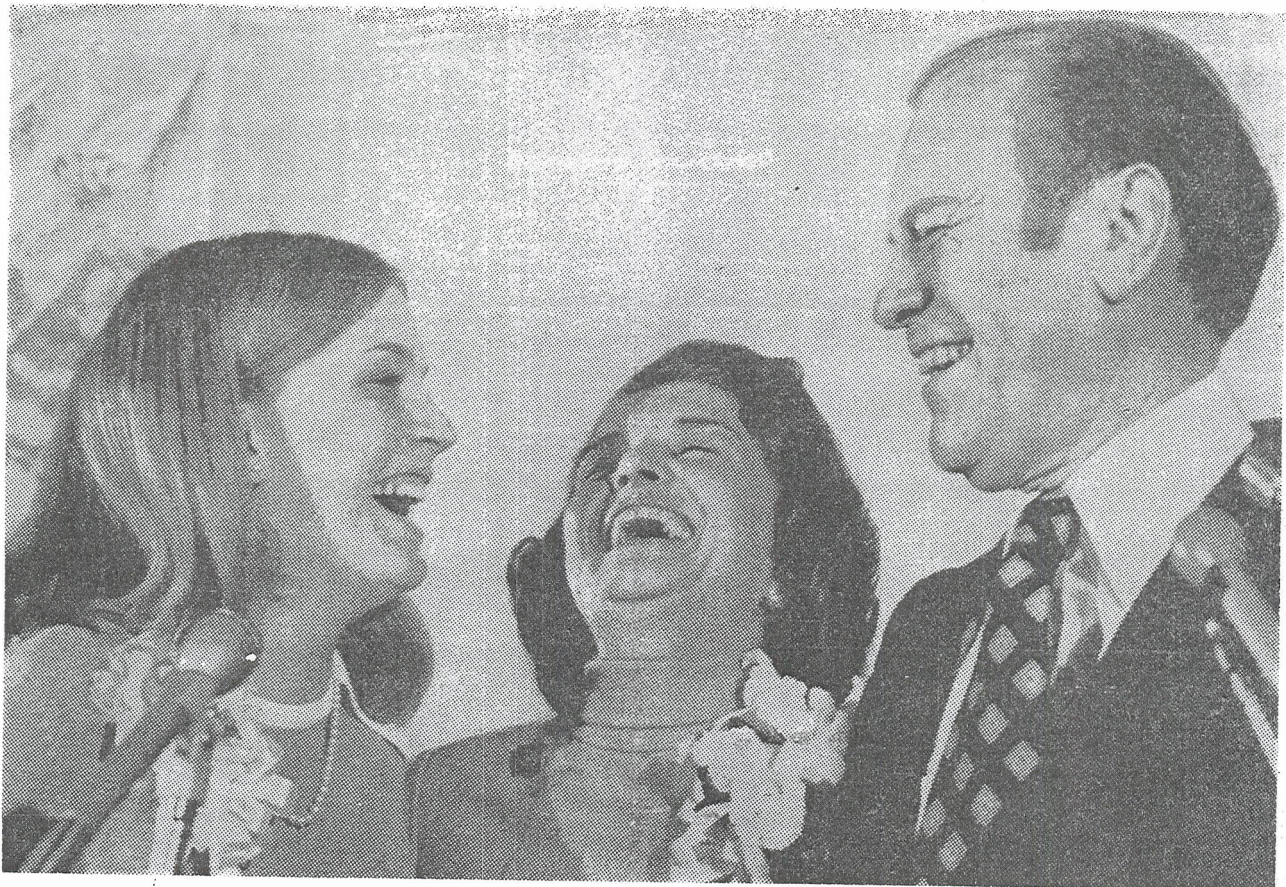
"He is one of those hewers of wood and drawers of water upon which our country depends," said his friend, representative George Mahon of Texas, a Democrat, who probably holds as much power as Appropriations Committee chairman as Ford enjoyed as minority leader.

The remark was meant as a compliment, but it also described the limits of Ford's workaday reputation in the capital's politics — a reliable lineman in a town where quarterbacks get the headlines.

He was nobody's superstar.

Then, day by day, as congressmen and senators and other political leaders came forward to assess the man, the idea of "Vice President Ford" sounded better and better to them and, who knew, even "President Ford" had a certain ring. I view his, but in this period of swift change only the foolhardy offers his own voting record as a standard of wisdom and consistency."

Representative Paul McCloskey of California, a wayward liberal who has of-



Vice President Gerald Ford, Betty Ford and their daughter Susan Elizabeth enjoyed a laugh last night during a reception at the Capitol Hill Club after Ford's swearing-in ceremony AP Wirephoto

ten strayed from Ford's flock, confessed: "I am puzzled sometimes over exactly what it is about Jerry Ford that causes me to like him so well and respect him so much." The explanation, McCloskey decided, was old-fashioned Midwestern honesty.

"His word is good, not just to the letter of an understanding, but in the spirit of that understanding," said another liberal, Representative Richard Bolling of Missouri, the intellectual patriarch of house reformers.

"He is a man of strong convictions and opinions, but he is also a man who truly respects the opinions of others."

Even Ford's limitations were transformed into virtues.

His lackluster style was described as a welcome tonic for a populace sick of flashy rhetoric. "Thank God

he's got character, not charisma," a Democratic county chairman from California wrote to Senator Alan Cranston. "We've had too much of the one, too little of the other."

The old LBJ wisecrack — the one about Jerry Ford playing too much football without a helmet — drew a thoughtful rebuttal from one anonymous California Republican leader:

"Things might be better if Richard Nixon had made that Whittier football team. Thank God, Gerald Ford made the Michigan team. He's strong and he knows it. He's tough and he knows it. He won't have to prove his manhood. And I'm not thinking only about Nixon when I say that — look at his predecessor. Thank God, too, that Ford wasn't a quarterback. He knows he doesn't know all the answers."

The bouquets for Ford be-

came so thick and fragrant that Representative Joe Waggoner, a Louisiana Democrat who has often worked with Ford to block liberal measures, couldn't resist teasing the minority leader.

"I've heard so many nice things about you" Waggoner told Ford, "I've concluded you've got to be a fairy — you couldn't be real."

A small, persistent band of liberals felt the same way. They argued that, after all, this was the same Jerry Ford who tried to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas a couple of years ago, who has stuck doggedly to artisan attacks on most every issue, who voted against most of the

major social legislation of the last decade.

"They'll rue the day," warned Representative Don Edwards, a liberal Democrat from California.

"He is going to be a bad president. He's more conservative than Nixon and his judgement's not as good."

For the overwhelming majority, however, confirmation of Ford by both House and Senate established this principle: that partisan and ideological preferences must give way to another standard of judgment, the personal quality of the man, regardless of his views.

On the scorecard, Jerry Ford scored remarkably high.