

WXPost

DEC 8 1973

Ford's First Day: Transition Is Made, President Defended

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Gerald R. Ford began his first full day as the 40th Vice President of the United States with a ringing defense of President Nixon's record and a categorical denial that the President has any plans to resign.

"I can assure you that the President has no intention whatever of resigning," Ford said at his first Senate press conference yesterday after a discussion and picture-taking session with Mr. Nixon at the White House. "It was reiterated to me this morning."

Ford also told reporters,

"There is no evidence that would justify impeachment . . . I don't think the President is a political liability to any candidate (and) in his five years, he has done a super job in foreign policy. He has many more pluses in the political scene than minuses."

Ford said he had brought up the matter of possible resignation at his meeting with Mr. Nixon because, while he knew Mr. Nixon's mind, "I'm going on one of the quiz shows on Sunday and I wanted it straight from the President himself."

Also, papers to prove Mr. Nixon innocent of wrongdoing

in the ITT case, the "milk deal" and other incidents will be released "prior to the first of the year," Ford said the President told him.

The President had assured him, he said, that once these documents are released and all the facts are out, "he should be completely exonerated."

Ford's meeting with Mr. Nixon was one of the high points of a day devoted largely to making the transition from the job of House GOP leader, a post he's held since 1965, the Vice President of the United

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States and presiding officer of the Senate.

His day began about 8:20 a.m. at his House offices, where 15 House pages presented him with a briefcase they had bought as a going-away present. After conferring with aides, he took the long walk across the Capitol to the office of Frank Valeo, secretary of the Senate.

There he went through the ritual required of every Senate member and presiding officer: filling out documents, insurance forms and other necessary papers to put himself and his staff on the Senate roster for business purposes, franking privileges and the like. With his accession to the vice presidency Thursday, his pay rose from \$49,500 a year to \$62,500.

Flanked by aides and Secret Service men, Ford marched into the Senate

chamber five minutes before the formal opening of the session. At 10 a.m., he mounted the president's chair and stood with head bowed as the Rev. Dr. C. Ralston Smith of Bethesda, a special assistant to evangelist Billy Graham, intoned the daily prayer as guest minister.

"We pray for each member that he might be responsible to thy purposes and promptings," said Dr. Smith. "Especially do we ask thy blessing upon our Vice President, Gerald Ford, as he undertakes the responsibility of presiding at these significant sessions. Endue

(sic) him plentifully with wisdom and grace."

Then, as his first business yesterday, Ford presided as the Senate—with only a handful of members on the floor—routinely passed by voice vote a bill to create a Boston national historical park and confirmed some

nominations. In a loud, steady voice, Ford called forth, "Without objection it is so ordered," each time Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) asked routine approval that action be taken.

With still only a few on the floor, Ford listened to Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) express delight that the District of Columbia will have a baseball team and that the first game will be with the Philadelphia Phillies, and to George McGovern (D-S.D.) deliver a speech on veterans' educational benefits.

By 10:12 a.m., Ford's first spell as presiding officer was over; a senator took the chair and Ford retired to the "formal room."

The "formal room," located inside the Senate chambers, is one of five offices Ford will enjoy as Vice President. It is a stately reception office about 25 feet by 25, with a huge desk and chair, a grandfather clock, a deep blue rug, a large painting of Vice President John Nance Garner (1933-1941) and busts of Vice President Henry Wilson (1873 to 1875) and Senate President Pro Tem Lafayette Foster (1865 to 1867).

Vice Presidents, who usu-

ally don't spend too much time presiding anyhow, often repair to this room when the rhetoric gets them down.

This time, however, Ford was talking arrangements with top aide Bob Hartman and other staff men. These included Walter Mote, former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's legislative aide for the Senate whom Ford is keeping in the same job, and Ken Belieu, a former White House liaison man for the Senate (1969 to 1971) and under secretary of both the Army and the Navy at different times, who is joining Ford's staff.

He also posed for pictures with Sens. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) and Bob Dole (R-Kan.), both up for re-election in 1974.

At 11:06, Ford braved the nearly empty chamber again, taking the gavel and remaining until 11:47 while Sens. Alan Bible (D-Nev.) and Paul J. Fannin (R-Ariz.) declaimed on the energy crisis.

Ford appeared a trifle glassy-eyed from the talk when he surrendered the chair and went back into the "formal room." Standing under a massive chandelier donated by Teddy Roosevelt (who was said to have asserted its tinkling would keep senators awake), he received a silver medallion and silver plate from Rep. Garry Brown (R-Mich.) on behalf of Michigan friends.

Posing for pictures with Sen. Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) and Rep. John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), just elected to replace Ford as House GOP

leader, the Vice President quipped:

"He's going to be a much more effective leader. He was elected unanimously; I only won 73 to 67 when I ran for leader."

After his White House talk with the President, Ford returned for a formal press conference at which he defended Mr. Nixon, and said, "When the President isn't there I will preside" at National Security Council meetings, and indicated he expects to campaign for GOP candidates nationwide in 1974.

Ford said he doesn't see any way to stop the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment investigation but is confident that it will find Mr. Nixon guiltless. "If a committee of 38 members, 21 Democratic and 17 Republican, if they voted against the resolution by a majority vote, I think that would be totally satisfactory" to reassure the American people, said Ford.

The vice presidency is, at least in theory, the second highest office in the land, and Ford was confirmed by a Nov. 27 Senate vote of 92 to 3 and a Thursday House vote of 387 to 35 (The Washington Post inadvertently reported it at 389 to 35.) Despite this handsome endorsement to such an August position, Ford revealed with a laugh yesterday that he hadn't been offered a bite of lunch at the White House, so he went to his old House office to eat.

He didn't come back to the Senate again to preside until 4:13 p.m. when the Rhodesian chrome bill was being discussed—again with only a handful present.

At 4:40 p.m. he left to get ready to co-host a fund-raising party at the Capitol Hill Club for Rep. Stanford Parris (R-Va.)

Asked if he found the Senate discourse any more enlightening than House debate, Ford laughed and replied, "I don't think I should make any comments about the caliber of the debate on either side of the Capitol."