

# It's Gerald Ford's Time to Choose

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THE TIME is not very far off when Gerald Ford will have to choose between his obligations as Richard Nixon's Vice President and his responsibilities as the likely next President of the United States.

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Last Tuesday evening, at a social gathering, Ford grabbed a southern Republican congressman reported wavering on impeachment and told him, "You can't vote against the President." Last Thursday, he went to the home district of a House Judiciary Committee member and told that man's constituents, "I can say from the bottom of my heart the President of the United States is innocent. He is right." 25? 402

On Friday and Saturday, in speeches and interviews, Ford said the President's removal would cause "real harm to the country," and claimed that the Judiciary Committee proceedings were "partisan" and a "travesty." The President, he said, "deserves much better" treatment.

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HE HAS, in short, done everything that he can do — and more — for the man who has been his friend for a quarter-century, whose policies at home and abroad he ardently supports, and to whom he is indebted for the honor of his present high office.

But Ford is being told by some of his own friends and well-wishers that he must now think of his obligations to his country and himself, and consider:

- That he has no constitutional role whatsoever in the impeachment process

and that his effort to intrude in the deliberations of the House and Senate can only cause unnecessary resentment.

- That his rhetoric on behalf of the President has already led him to make loose charges against men and institutions he really does not wish to defame and whose good will and respect are terribly important to him.

- And that his volunteer activities to rally the President's last-ditch supporters may cripple his ability to unite the country, as its new President, when Mr. Nixon falls.

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IT IS THAT last argument that weighs most heavily among Ford's friends, for there is little doubt in their minds — or almost anyone else's — that he will be President before this year is out.

The size and composition of the Judiciary Committee vote for impeachment makes it virtually certain that Mr. Nixon will be impeached by the House by a margin that approaches or — more likely — exceeds a two-thirds majority.

His hard-core supporters in the Senate are proportionately scarcer than in the House. The momentum of impeachment appears irreversible.

Ford has told some of those who have been remonstrating with him that he knows there is a point when he must say, publicly, that the case of Richard Nixon is now before the jury of Congress, and it would not be appropriate for him to comment further.

That time is now.