

NYTimes AUG 7 1974 AUG 7 1974
Problems of Transition

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6—The mood of Washington has been transformed by President Nixon's confession of guilt in the Watergate cover-up. On both sides of the aisle in Congress, members are shocked but relieved by the evidence. The main question here is no longer whether the President will go, but how and when. He is not yet through, but he's finished.

This has released an odd mixture of paradoxical emotions. The Capital is not really surprised to find that the President was involved in the cover-up, but it is startled by the brassy lies, astonished that the system finally produced clear evidence and an overwhelming consensus for conviction, puzzled that the President chooses, almost longs, for the final punishment and humiliation, vaguely sad about the human tragedy but at the same time almost giddy that the shadow of Watergate is finally passing.

For the first time in over a year, men and women here can now talk seriously about reconciliation and plan together for the future and there is an eagerness to pass the bill of divorce and get on with the orderly transition from President Nixon to President Ford.

This will take some time. The leaders of both parties would like to hurry it along, but there are some problems. The House Judiciary Committee has yet to write the majority report supporting the three articles of impeachment, and it has to take into account the new damaging evidence finally disclosed by the President.

Once this is finished, it must lie on the table for three days so that any members on the committee still supporting the President can prepare their minority report. So the chances of starting the House debate on the floor before the 19th are not good.

The Senate is in no mood now for delaying tactics by the President in bringing the case to trial. Last week it appeared that the White House might be able to stall the start of the Senate proceedings for weeks and prolong the debate for months, but the President's confession has clarified the issue and produced a determination by the leaders of both parties to get a final vote before the election in early November.

Even so, there will be an interregnum of three months with a lame-duck President. What will he do during this awkward period? Washington wonders about this. Would he agree, as some have suggested, to the creation of a Council of State, composed of the Vice President and the leaders of Congress, with whom he would agree to consult on major decisions of foreign and economic policy?

WASHINGTON

Perhaps more important, since he agrees that his impeachment is now a foregone conclusion, would Mr. Nixon agree to the careful preparation of Mr. Ford for his forthcoming responsibilities, and to the creation of machinery to assure that Mr. Ford's Cabinet is ready to take over when Mr. Nixon's Cabinet members send their resignations to the White House?

The Council of State idea could be a bit clumsy, but the world will not stand still during Mr. Nixon's long farewell. There will undoubtedly be new alarms overseas, and quite a few hiccups in the sick economy between now and November, and the political and emotional pressure on the President will be severe. Thus the suggestion for a consultative council.

In more normal circumstances, the transition in the United States from one administration to another has been marked by a high degree of cooperation between the outgoing and the incoming administrations.

The present situation is obviously more difficult, for by cooperating with Mr. Ford, Mr. Nixon would seem to be assuming his own conviction, but the problem of transition remains. Other governments obviously see the Nixon Administration coming to an end and wonder what changes there will be in American policy toward them under Mr. Ford, whose experience in foreign affairs is not his strongest point.

Fortunately, the Vice President has known Henry Kissinger ever since he started going to Mr. Kissinger's seminars at Harvard fifteen years ago, and there is every indication that he will ask Mr. Kissinger to continue as Secretary of State, and that Mr. Kissinger will agree, if invited.

Nevertheless, the need for a rapid transition is obvious. The Chinese in particular have been asking for reassurances of continuity in American policy ever since the impeachment of Mr. Nixon seemed certain, and Mr. Kissinger twice this week, once at the Chinese mission here, and again in public, has been trying to assure them and other nations that the foreign policy of the United States has been settled on a steady course, with bipartisan support.

These will, just the same, be difficult days both for the President and the Vice President. Mr. Nixon still has it in his power to help ease the way for his successor. If he cannot save himself, he can help those who inherit the wreckage. He can either go out and slam the door or open it generously to the Vice President. This may be his last public act, and the manner of his going will be important.