

A Spirit of Change

By James Reston
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Washington

The capital took the news with remarkable serenity, almost as if it had lost a President but found itself.

In the last 11 years, it has seen one president murdered, another chose, under attack, not to run again, and a third was driven from office, so it was vaguely sad, but at the same time it was almost unanimously relieved that the dark riddle of the

Nixon administration had finally passed.

The fears of an uncertain result, of division, bitterness and recrimination, and of a long trial of a paralyzed president, so menacing

only a few short days ago, had been avoided. And the nation's political institutions, so long under skeptical attack, had held together and come out with a clear deci-

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sion and a fairly united people.

In the end, Mr. Nixon did, as he had done so many times before, what he said he would not do. As he had switched on China, the Soviet Union, on economic policy, executive privilege, and many other things, he abandoned his threat to fight both impeachment and conviction.

"Leaders should guide as far as they can, and then vanish," H. G. Wells once

wrote. "Their ashes should not choke the fires they have lit." Almost all Mr. Nixon's friends gave him this advice, and finally he took it.

What has been the effect of all this on the nation, its people, its political parties and other institutions, and its relations with the rest of the world? These were the questions that were being asked here even before Mr. Nixon resigned.

The practical and personal questions of leadership are unprecedented in the history

in the Capital

of the republic. There are 896 days to go before the end of the term Mr. Nixon was elected to fulfill by the largest popular majority in the history of American presidential elections — two years and five and a half months.

The nation will be led in this period, including the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1976, by President Gerald Ford, and a vice president yet to be chosen, neither of whom will have

been elected by the people of the United States — a situation that was not foreseen, and probably would have startled the founding fathers.

Nevertheless, the outlook is that Ford will have the greatest support and sympathy, even if not elected by popular ballot, of any president since Lyndon Johnson took over the White House after the assassination of President Kennedy.

In Washington, there is already a marked change. Mr.

Nixon was a secretive, furtive, and fundamentally intricate man, who regarded the Congress and the press as his enemies.

Ford is just the opposite; open, uncomplicated, and modest. He is conservative and partisan, but he has spent most of his mature life in the give-and-take of the House, and regards the majority Democratic leaders not only as power but as hat to be dealt with, but as his personal friends.

His tastes are simple, his

ambitions limited, his method open and trustful. He regards this whole drama as an accident, in which he now has to play a role far beyond his ambitions or desires, and in the life of his family, this astonishing turn of events has come at the wrong time.

At 61, he has got beyond all ambition, in fact has achieved far beyond his dreams. He was planning to retire to private life, on a promise to his wife, even before Mr. Nixon picked him as vice president.

There are even reasons for believing now, though he would never admit them, that he will regard himself as an interim president, who would try to bring about the reconciliation of the country in the next two years, and then retire.

In the nation, the spirit of the people may very well be going with Ford — at least

for the time being. It has gone through a long period of division over Vietnam and Watergate, and is tired of contention, and is longing for a little peace and quiet.

There is a strong feeling here that Ford could be an ideal president in such a time. Just as Coolidge took over after the scandals of the Harding administration, and quietly calmed things down and created an atmosphere that kept the Republicans in power for another nine years, Ford has a chance to revive the fortunes of the Republicans in the election years of 1974 and 1976.

Meanwhile, Watergate has had its effects on the country as a whole, and Ford, with his simple moral approach to the presidency, may be very much in touch with the mood of the country.

Though he is a party man,

he is likely to support reform in campaign financing, preservation of personal privacy, and strict control over the integrity of the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, and the CIA.

He will be cautious about change, and will probably keep most of the Nixon cabinet for a while, particularly at the departments of state, defense and the treasury, but he is not overly enthusiastic about Attorney General William Saxbe so there will be no political control of justice before long, and like Truman, he is likely to change most of his cabinet before the end of the year.

One of the interesting things about Ford, though he is no intellectual, is that, un-

like Johnson and Mr. Nixon, he does not feel uncomfortable or threatened by exceptional talent. In this, he is more like President Truman, who could trust the sophisticated minds of Acheson and Lovett and bring into the cabinet strong men like General Marshall.

This is really the main question in Washington now: How will Ford approach his new responsibilities? He immediately said he will keep Kissinger at state, but who will be his vice president, and his chief of staff in the White House; these are the questions now being asked in the capital.

The front runner for vice president, with the backing of Mel Laird, is former New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, but there is a lot of support for George Bush, the chairman of the Republican National Committee,

who is young and attractive and could be a candidate for the presidency in 1976, if given a chance at the vice presidency now.

All this, however, is speculative. The main thing is that even the thought of a Ford presidency has changed the mood here, and increased the hope for a more open, candid, and cooperative presidency. T