

# It's a Whole New Political Ball Game

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## Washington

President Nixon's resignation drastically altered the American political landscape.

It improved Republican prospects for the congressional elections in November, thrust Vice President Gerald Ford into the favorite's role for the 1976 presidential election, ended the Watergate agony that has served to bind together the heterogeneous Democratic party and removed from the political stage the man who was the dominant Republican for the last 15 years.

In a larger sense, it seemed to presage an era of more open government, of more cooperation and less antagonism between Capitol Hill and the White House, and of decline of the White House staff as an independent power center.

At least in the beginning, pragmatic conservatism is expected to remain the dominant ideological tone in the executive branch.

How that will be translated into policies, and how

those policies will shape the political dialogue, will not be clear for weeks. But experts in the two fields forecast an essentially unchanged foreign policy and a similar, but more carefully and consistently applied, economic policy.

By his decision, Mr. Nixon altered the lives of many people. Some, like Alexander M. Haig Jr. and Ronald L. Ziegler, are likely to disappear from political life. Others, like the men and women Ford chooses for the vice presidency and for key cabinet positions will move close to the seat of power.

New institutions of government or those associated with them will remain unchanged. For the presidency is the central element in the American system, acting upon all others. When it changes hands, everyone else must adjust.

The end of the Watergate epoch in American politics with Mr. Nixon's departure from office will clearly help the party to which he had become an albatross. But the extent of the help is impossible to calculate, now, and may never be assessed with precision.

Most politicians had anticipated broad Democratic gains in the Senate and the House of Representatives in November, with some anticipating gains large enough to give the Democrats more than 300 seats in the House. A Republican debacle unmatched since the Depression seemed possible.

Watergate was the main reason. With the President's Senate trial coinciding with the campaign, as it had been scheduled to, politicians of both parties considered it inevitable that voters would take revenge on Republican nominees.

There may still be a visceral reaction, caused by memories of the scandal,

but few expect it to be as strong as it would have been had the President clung to office.

Polls taken for the Democratic leadership in the House had shown that 15 per cent of Republican voters were planning to vote for Democrats, 15 per cent were planning to stay at home and 15 per cent had not made up their minds yet.

If any appreciable portion of the Republicans stay at home — as they did in a number of special elections earlier this year — and if independent voters swing massively to the Democrats — again, as they did in the special elections — the Republicans will still be in peril.

But a cross-section of political leaders in all parts of the country don't expect that. They said in interviews that the popularity of Ford, and the inevitable period of good feeling enjoyed by incoming presidents, should cushion any lingering Watergate resentment.

Much will depend on Ford's ability to deal with the economy, particularly inflation. With Watergate receding as a political issue, the voter's traditional concern with pocketbook issues can be expected to reassert itself.

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