

POLITICAL SCENE SHARPLY ALTERED

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G.O.P. Prospects Improved,
Ford in Good Spot for '76
and Watergate Fades

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 8—President Nixon's resignation drastically altered the American political landscape.

It improved Republican prospects for the Congressional elections in November, thrust Vice President 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.

Lives Are Altered

A kind of "honeymoon" between the executive and legislative branches was widely predicted by Congressional leaders today. Congressmen who knew Mr. Ford for years as a Capitol Hill colleague said that they expected to work closely with him.

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 Gen. Alexander H. Haig Jr. and Ronald L. Ziegler, are likely to disappear from political life. Others, like the men and women Mr. Ford chooses for the Vice-Presidency and for key Cabinet positions will move close to the seat of power.

Few institutions of government or those associated with it, will remain unchanged, for

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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 expected broad Democratic gains in the Senate and the House of Representatives in November, with some expecting 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 scheduled to coincide with the campaign, 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 if the President had clung to office.

Polls taken for the Democratic leadership in the House had shown that 15 per cent of Republican voters were plan-

ning to vote for Democrats, 15 per cent were planning to stay home and 15 per cent had not made up their minds.

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.

Leaders Interviewed

But a cross-section of political leaders in all parts of the country does not expect that to happen. They said in interviews that the popularity of Mr. Ford, and the inevitable period of good feeling enjoyed by incoming Presidents should cushion any lingering resentment over Watergate.

Much will depend on Mr. 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. If unchecked, inflation will hurt Republicans.

For Republican Senators and Representatives seeking re-election this fall, Mr. Nixon's decision offers special benefits. They had been locked into a dilemma—either vote for impeachment and antagonize the pro-Nixon hard core, or vote

against it and lose independents and others.

Now none will have to address the question of impeachment. Only the 17 Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee will have to explain their votes, and the departure of the President will probably make those votes a less burning issue in their campaigns.

Mr. Ford's accession to the

Presidency also means a new chance for the Republican party organizationally.

Ever since the departure of Ray C. Bliss as national chairman in 1968, the party structure has suffered—largely because Mr. Nixon paid the professionals little heed and allowed his staff to make decisions with more regard for his personal good than for that of the party's.

Security Blanket

For the Democrats, the resignation of Mr. Nixon will seem like the snatching away of a security blanket, many Democratic politicians believe. The Vietnam war and associated issues opened wide fissures in the party, which were clearly visible in the 1968 and 1972 Presidential campaigns. Watergate has obscured these—after all, who needed to worry about the party's stance when it had a ready-made issue?

Now, however, the Democrats are going to find themselves faced once more with the problem that they have been unable to solve—how to repair the old New Deal coalition or assemble a new one.

The party may also have to find a candidate strong enough to contend with an incumbent President, because Mr. Ford is widely considered at this early date an almost unbeatable

front-runner for the 1976 Republican nomination. The Democrats had not expected to be obliged to try to unseat an incumbent, which is seldom an easy proposition.

Finally, the Democrats may well have to deal with a backlash from those who believe that they hounded Mr. Nixon from office and resent that fact. Such a reaction is considered possible even though almost the entire Republican Congressional contingent supported impeachment at the end.

Mr. Nixon's departure from public life, after playing a major role for more than two decades, will subtly alter the tone of politics in America. He was one of the Democrats' favorite demons, second only perhaps to Herbert Hoover. Perhaps the Democrats will try to keep his mind, as they did with Mr. Hoover.

Under Mr. Ford, the givens of political life in Washington are likely to change rather dramatically. He is a Congressional man, with wide acquaintances in both houses and both parties on Capitol Hill. No matter what the squabbles over issues, there will be none of the guerrilla warfare between the opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue that marked the Nixon Administration.

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