



Mr. and Mrs. Ford. A member of the House for 25 years and its Minority Leader, he was named Vice President by Nixon on Oct. 12, 1973, two days after Agnew resigned.



Mr. and Mrs. John Connally. The Texas Democrat-turned-Republican was top contender, but his switch antagonized Congress members who might have held up confirmation.

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How Richard Nixon Chose Gerald Ford

by Lloyd Shearer

WASHINGTON, DC.

One of the group of questions most frequently asked of the Personality Parade department of this publication concerns Gerald Ford. People ask over and over again: "Why did Richard Nixon choose Gerald Ford as his Vice President? . . . Was there a deal between Nixon and Ford? . . . Did Nixon choose Ford because he thought Ford would make the best possible U.S. President? . . . Why did former President Richard Nixon choose Gerald Ford as his Vice President instead of George Bush or John Connally or Senator Hugh Scott or former Secretary of State William Rogers or Ronald Reagan or Mel Laird? . . . Did Ford have something on Nixon? Is that why Nixon picked him to be Vice President? . . . When Ford

was Vice President did he ever promise to pardon Nixon beforehand?"

The one man who knows the answers to all these questions is Richard Nixon. But Richard Nixon is not speaking at this point. And if he were, his credibility has been reduced to so low a mark that practically no one would believe him.

The question

In an effort to find answers to the above questions, Parade recently conducted a sampling of knowledgeable White House correspondents, U.S. Senators and members of the House; each was asked: "Why do you think Richard Nixon chose Gerald Ford to replace Spiro Agnew as Vice President of the United States?"

Some of the respondents asked not to

be identified. Others had no objection. Herewith some of their replies:

Sen. Hugh Scott (R., Penn.): "On the day Jerry Ford was told Nixon was going to nominate him for the Vice Presidency, I preceded him in the Oval Office of the White House. Frankly, I considered myself one of the five possible nominees for the job. But President Nixon explained to me, 'I'm sorry, but I've decided not to appoint you Vice President. We don't want to have a fight in the Senate over the Republican leadership. I'm sure you understand.'

"I said, 'Yes, sir, I do. And it will come as a great relief to my wife who frankly was against it.' And then I said, 'Does that leadership reason also apply to Jerry Ford in the House? Is he dis-

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qualified for the same reason?" And President Nixon said to me, 'It sure does.'

"Nixon seemed so positive that on the way out, I ran into Ford in the ante room, and I said to him, 'Jerry, it's not going to be either of us.'

"Later in the day when reporters asked me about the Vice Presidency I indicated that both Ford and myself were out of contention, which I must say damaged my credibility with the reporters. *

"The truth, of course, is that I was lied to. The Nixon White House crowd—Haldeman, Ehrlichman, that bunch—they never did like me, particularly they didn't like my stand on civil rights—and when it came to choosing a Vice President, Nixon was looking for a man with traits different from mine."

Sen. Lowell Weicker (R., Conn.): "I think Nixon chose Jerry Ford as his Vice President for a very simple reason. There was no deal. Jerry was plainly a good, honest party lieutenant and loyalist on whom Nixon felt he could rely at all times. It was as simple as that. He knew Ford would give him no trouble."

Sen. Walter Mondale (D., Minn.): "Nixon picked Ford because (1) He thought Ford could be quickly confirmed. (2) He felt Ford would be an ally in aborting the move towards impeachment. (3) He knew Ford had always been a Nixon loyalist and would remain one to the end."

Peter Lisagor (Chicago Daily News): "Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Speaker of the House Carl Albert told Nixon that Ford was one of the few men the Congress would quickly confirm. Ford was one of their own, and Congress would confirm him without a hassle. With any of the others, there possibly would be a confirmation fight."

A TV network White House correspondent: "In my opinion Nixon fixed on Ford because he knew that in Ford he had a 100 percent loyalist, one who had supported him all through the Vietnam War, one who had supported him all down the line in every single vote and on every single issue. His loyalty was complete, and his gratitude would be endless."

"To Nixon, Jerry Ford was impeachment insurance. We may not have known it at the time, but Nixon knew the Watergate conspiracy was unraveling, and he was determined to bluff it through, to stonewall it to the end. He needed someone like Jerry Ford desperately. In choosing Ford, Nixon was saying to the House, 'This is the man who will become President of the United States in case you impeach me.' Further, he was saying to the House,

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'You all know Jerry Ford. You've all worked with Jerry Ford. His greatest ambition in political life is to become Speaker of the House. Is this the guy you want to become President?'

"I think Nixon felt strongly that the Congress liked Jerry Ford but did not hold him in any great Presidential light. Nixon wanted to provide the House with a contrasting alternative in case the House seriously considered impeaching him. Of course, as we all know now, his schemes and maneuvers backfired. He couldn't worm his way out of the Watergate mess. He couldn't stonewall it. But back in the fall of '73 he didn't know that. And he was sure Jerry Ford would help. And Ford sure did try. He went up and down the country telling everyone that he felt the President was 'totally innocent and completely exonerated.' He was intent upon proving his loyalty to Nixon even though Mel Laird and others told him to be careful."

Tom Brokaw (NBC White House correspondent): "Ford was appointed Vice President by Nixon as part of impeachment politics."

Melvin Laird (Secretary of Defense, 1969-1973): "I prepared people in the Congress for the Spiro Agnew resignation, and I was involved strongly in supporting Jerry Ford for the Vice Presidency, feeling that eventually he would become President."

"I knew that Mr. Nixon favored John Connally for the job. He had great respect and admiration for Connally, more so than he had for Ford, and he really felt that Connally would make an outstanding Vice President. I know many other candidates were mentioned, but basically it was a contest between Ford and Connally, and I sided with Ford."

"I conferred with my old friends in the House, men like Barber Conable of New York and John Rhodes of Arizona and several others, and I got them to write letters recommending Ford, and I took those to the President—evidence that Ford would be confirmed quickly."

I put on a drive for Ford because I felt then as I do now that he was the best man for the position. I had nothing against Connally, but he had antagonized many Democrats by converting to the Republican Party, many members of which didn't really accept him as a true Republican. They sort of regarded him as an opportunist. I felt there would be a long hard struggle to confirm Connally, while Ford would breeze through."

"Still, the President admired John Connally, his stature, his sureness, his authority. I agreed with all those virtues, but I told the President—this was before Connally got involved in the milk funds scandal, of course—that I couldn't go along with Connally. I was pushing for Ford, because he had Congressional support, and he had Congressional support because he was a man of honesty, integrity, and fairness—he could disagree with a man without becoming disagreeable, he could differ with a man

nism. In two days' time, the President came around to my way of thinking and offered the job to Ford. But always insofar as I know, and I was pretty close to the situation, there were only two men in the running, Ford and Connally. And I think the best man got it.

"I think Jerry Ford was the best man in the country to become President. I look back on his first few months in office. He may have made a few mistakes. What man doesn't in feeling his way? But no one else could have brought this country through the period of transition as smoothly as Jerry Ford. He is a man of conciliation, compromise, courtesy, and cooperation. There is nothing antagonistic about his nature. Regardless of Mr. Nixon's motives, he made a good move, I believe, in placing Jerry Ford in a position to lead the nation."

Carl Albert (D., Okla.), Speaker of the House: "During the late afternoon of the day of Mr. Agnew's resignation [Oct. 10, 1973] I received a call from the President. He wanted Senator Mansfield, the Majority Leader of the Senate and me to come to the Oval Office of the White House to talk to him.

"When we arrived we were promptly ushered into his office. The President started the conversation. He began by saying that he thought the 25th Amendment contemplated that the President would quickly nominate a Vice President. He felt he should have the right to try to select someone of his own party. I agreed fully. . . .

"He said he would be glad to have recommendations from anyone and added he would consider any recommendations we might have.

"I felt this was just a matter of being courteous to Senator Mansfield and me, and I wasn't going to make any suggestions. It was obvious that he was moving to get somebody who would help him

and would agree with him on issues and who would be confirmed. However, Senator Mansfield offered the names of two men, both Republican, he thought would be splendid and confirmed quickly: former Secretary of State William Rogers and former U.S. Senator from Kentucky John Sherman Cooper.

"I said to the President that since Senator Mansfield had proposed names I thought I had somebody. The President asked, 'Who is it, Jerry Ford?' I said, 'Yes, sir.'

Congress' job

"The President said that it was incumbent upon the Congress to move as expeditiously as possible, that the 25th Amendment contemplated that the country should have a Vice President at all times and that the stability and security of the country demanded it.

"He was kind enough to say that I would be fine as a nominee as far as he was concerned. He obviously wanted and was entitled to name his own man. . . ."

None of the correspondents, legislators, or government officials interviewed believe that former President Nixon exacted a promise of pardon from Gerald Ford in exchange for the Vice Presidency. Some suggested that Nixon judged Ford's loyalty correctly, that he knew "in his bones" that Ford would come across with a pardon.

"After all," offered one White House correspondent, "Jerry Ford is basically a political animal, a classic example of Sam Rayburn's admonition: 'To get along, go along'; he knows that a basic ingredient of politics is the payoff. He has probably gotten more jobs for more people, done more favors than anyone in government. He was the one who even brought Gordon Liddy into the federal government. Nixon knew well that Ford would show his gratitude when the time came. And Nixon was right. Ford not only pardoned him but agreed also to give him all the transition money he wanted and everything Nixon wanted in the way of retaining his tapes and papers. Unfortunately for Nixon, the Congress wouldn't go along with Ford, and the deal on the transition money and the tapes and papers was radically revised. But at least Nixon will never have to spend a night in jail for his role in the Watergate scandal. Ford pardoned him before he was even convicted of anything."

Wide agreement

Some veteran politicians and newsmen suggest that Nixon may have erred in choosing Gerald Ford as his successor—that is, as regards the nation's need for leadership in a time of economic crisis—but all agree to a man that Nixon was right on the mark in choosing Gerald Ford as his personal saviour.

and still retain his friendship, he was a healer of wounds, not an inflicter of wounds.

"I felt Jerry Ford was essential to the country, particularly at that time when there was so much rancor and antago-



Making History: For the first time, a Vice President nominated by the President under the 25th Amendment is sworn in to office. Chief Justice Warren Burger administers the oath on Dec. 6, 1973, as Mrs. Ford and Nixon look on.



Kingmaker Mel Laird and wife. Aside from Nixon himself, Laird was the man who was most responsible for the selection of Gerald Ford over John Connally.