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**PRESIDENT'S MAIL
SIFTED EACH WEEK**

Report Gives Him Sampling
of What the People Think

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WASHINGTON, March 29—

Every Friday a folder containing 50 or so letters, some scrawled in a shaky hand on lined school paper, some neatly typed on proper stationery, is sent to President Ford to give him a sample of what people are writing him about.

The weekly report, which also gives the President a statistical breakdown on the over-all flow of mail into the White House, told him last week, for example, that he had gotten 1,200 letters about the nation's economy, mostly asking questions about his economic proposals.

He also received another 1,136 letters about his request for \$522-million in emergency aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia. But the mail on that subject was not particularly reassuring — 864 letters opposed the additional aid, only 211 supported it, and another 61 letters made comments about the issue without registering a pro or con view.

Keeping track of such a mundane matter as the mail is the largest single unit in the total White House staff of about 500—a staff of 15 writers and secretaries who draft replies to the letters received, plus a Civil Service staff of about 170 who stay on from Administration to Administration and actually process the flow of mail that cascades each morning into an office complex on the ground floor of the Executive Office Building next to the White House.

Variation of Flow

On a normal day, the White House receives about 5,000 letters addressed to the President or just to the White House, and when some event becomes prominent in the news, the flow can swell to as high as 30,000 to 40,000 each day.

Mr. Ford's pardon of former President Richard M. Nixon last September, for instance, brought a flood of nearly 300,

000 letters, which ran about three-to-one against the pardon and which jammed up the mail room operation so much that extra personnel had to be brought in from the Defense Department to help out.

"To handle this kind of volume day in and day out you need quite a few individuals," said Roland L. Elliott, a former director of alumni relations at the University of California at Los Angeles who has been the White House director of correspondence since 1971.

"Every letter is read by a human being," he said, and as it is read a decision is made on how to respond. Many letters seek assistance, such as inquiring about a late or missing Social Security check, and these are sent on to be tended to by the various departments and agencies.

Also, some of the mail consists of coupons clipped from newspapers registering opinions on some subject, or what is obviously an organized letter-writing campaign in which a lot of letters read the same.

"We do try and answer everything we can," Mr. Elliott said, although printed coupons usually are not acknowledged and a lot of writers neglect to put down their name and address.

Most of the replies go out over the signature of Mr. Elliott, and about 200 letters a day go out bearing Mr. Ford's signature. Everything — the original letter and the response — is then filed and becomes a permanent part of the Presidential Archives, Mr. Elliott said.

Although the Presidential mail ebbs and flows depending in part on news events, Mr. Elliott cautioned that the letters are "not necessarily an indication of what public sentiment is as a whole."

Some of the mail obviously is inspired by special interest groups and opponents of some particular Presidential action may be more inclined to write a letter than those who support the action, he noted.

"If we went by the mail that came in the last week before President Nixon resigned and drew a conclusion based on that, the feeling would have been that most people didn't want him to resign," Mr. Elliott recalled. "So it was not an accurate assessment of the public mood at that time, in my judgment."