



If I Were Ford. . .

Andrew Tully

ALL RIGHT, don't shoot. I'll go quietly to the \$2 window and put a deuce on Jimmy Carter to win the presidency. But let the record show that I did so under duress.

To put it another way, I think Carter should be favored, as of today, to go all the way. But he is not a shoo-in, not while they still have to count the votes. Anything can happen in the next three months and, anyway, the Republicans are not exactly defenseless.

Gerald Ford, for instance, could run simultaneously on the GOP's record and against that of the Democrats. In the euphoria with which the Democrats presently are seized following the enthronement of Jimmy Carter in New York, they have forgotten that Gerald Ford took office under trying circumstances and has done a pretty good job.

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IF I were Mr. Ford, I would swiftly dispose of the Nixon business. I would note without passion that Nixon turned out to be a twister, and that decent Republicans in Congress helped lead the campaign for his impeachment. I would not permit Carter or any other Democrat to associate me with my predecessor merely because he chose me as his Vice President.

Indeed, looking back on my brief administration, I would suggest with seemingly modesty that the country was lucky Nixon fingered me because I had restored honesty and decency to the White House.

As the noise in Madison Square Garden showed, the Democrats will zero in on Mr. Ford's pardon of Nixon. I would meet it head-on, saying in speech after speech that it was the right thing to do in a country already wracked with pain and that it would only have further divided the nation to haul Nixon into the dock.

I would remind the voters of the permissiveness of the 1960s under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson; of the unrest and rioting, the chaos on college campuses, and the rise of the drug culture.

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THE HIGH COST of living? Mr. Ford inherited inflation from Lyndon Johnson, who fought a major war without bothering to fund it. I would point out that the inflation rate had declined during my brief residence in the White House.

Finally I would warn the voters against the fiscal danger of giving one party too much power. I would boast that I had saved the taxpayers billions of dollars by vetoing lavish spending bills passed by a Democratic Congress. And ask whether the electorate wanted to elect to the presidency a willing accomplice of those spendthrifts on Capitol Hill.

As I said, Jimmy Carter is the favorite on the morning line. But the Republicans can make it a horse race if they stop brawling and start running.