

President	Gerald R. Ford Jr.
Chronological Order	38
Life Span	1913-2006
Home State	Michigan
Elected	Never elected President or Vice President. Succeeded to the presidency in 1974.
Political Party	Republican
Vice President	Nelson A. Rockefeller
First Lady	Elizabeth (Betty) Bloomer Warren Ford
Children	3 sons, 1 daughter
Physical Attributes	6' tall, sandy-blond hair, blue eyes, athletic
Undergraduate Education	University of Michigan (Economics and Political Science). He also received a law degree from Yale.
Military Service	Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy during WW II.
Profession	Attorney
Other Political Offices	U.S. House of Representatives, Vice President
Nickname	Jerry
Family Lineage	Irish, English
Religious Affiliation	Episcopalian



Biographical Notes

1. Gerald Ford was an open, honest, amiable, straightforward, and decent man who was duped into making an awful mistake: the 1974 pardon of Richard Nixon. When Ford was vice president, Nixon's chief of staff, Alexander Haig, came to him and proposed a deal: Nixon's resignation in exchange for a pardon from Ford when he became president. He even gave Ford a draft of the pardon handwritten by Nixon's White House Counsel. After taking a day to decide, Ford refused to make the deal, but the seed had been planted. When Ford became president, he retained Haig, who continued to scheme for a Nixon pardon. During his first press conference, Ford was bombarded with questions about Nixon's legal status. He left it furious and wondering how the country could ever move forward with the ex-president's legal situation unresolved.

Consequently, *one month after assuming the presidency*, Ford decided *on his own* – without consulting anyone in Congress or the special prosecutor or public opinion or any Cabinet member (other than Henry Kissinger) – to give his friend Nixon “a full, free and absolute pardon ... for all offenses against the United States ... he ... may have committed.” Ford granted the pardon without obtaining a clear admission of guilt from Nixon. The pardon set a terrible precedent that resonates with Americans in 2024: a man who, as a sitting president, commits multiple felonies in an attempt to maintain power, is never brought to justice, and never shows any remorse. As a practical matter, the Nixon pardon limited what Ford could do as president because the backlash to the pardon helped the Democrats win a veto-proof majority in the House and a large majority in the Senate in the 1974 midterm elections.

2. Gerald R. Ford Sr. was Jerry's stepfather. Jerry was born Leslie L. King Jr. in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1913. His biological father, Leslie L. King Sr., had a terrible temper and was abusive towards his mother, Dorothy. Sixteen days after Jerry was born, King Sr. threatened Dorothy with a butcher knife; she left him and took the baby with her. They had been married only eleven months.

King Sr. played no role in Jerry's life. Gerald Ford Sr. was a wonderful father, and Jerry said later, “He was my Dad.” It is noteworthy, however, that as an adult, Jerry Ford physically resembled Leslie L. King Sr. They were both six feet tall and had sandy-blond hair, blue eyes, and athletic builds. In a 1912 photograph, King Sr.'s face resembles Jerry Ford's.

Dorothy and Jerry went to live with her sister briefly, then moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to live with

her parents. Dorothy met Gerald Ford Sr. at a church social, and they married after a courtship of about a year. At the time of their marriage, Ford was a sales agent for a company that sold wall finish. Eventually, he became a manager with a home improvement company in Grand Rapids.

3. For a while, the Fords lived in a beautiful house in prosperous East Grand Rapids. However, when Jerry was ten, Gerald Sr. lost his managerial job and the heavily mortgaged house it sustained. (This setback may have inspired Jerry's lifelong aversion to mortgages, credit cards, and deficit spending.) The Fords then rented a three-bedroom house in a grittier section of Grand Rapids. They lived there for seven years – until Jerry was a senior in high school.

Gerald Sr. was involved with the Elks Club, the Kent County Republicans, and the local civil defense organization. He co-founded the Youth Commonwealth, an early attempt to assist city boys, many of them African-American, living in economically depressed areas of Grand Rapids. "There was always politics in the house," said one family member. The elder Ford had friends who were Democrats as well as Republicans. This bipartisanship would not be lost on Jerry any more than Senior's talent for establishing seemingly instant rapport with potential customers. "He went in with a true salesman's philosophy," his son Dick said. "How can I help you?" The same skill sustained Congressman Ford on the campaign trail and in the party caucus. It would prove invaluable in the Oval Office, where Ford's ability to forge bonds of trust with foreign leaders transcended differences in outlook and temperament.

As long as he lived, Gerald Jr. would ask himself how Gerald Sr. might handle a given situation. Yet, just as with his mother, there were limits to his stepfather's influence. The son took vigorous exception to the older man's view of lawyers as an "unnecessary commodity." There were certain qualities he inherited from his parents. "Jerry is not demonstrative," said his sister-in-law, Janet. He and his parents "were not touching people."

4. The Ford house was located a block from where school district lines met, so Jerry had his choice between three high schools. Central was the favored option for aspiring college students. Ottawa Hills, less elitist than Central, exerted nearly as powerful an appeal among upwardly mobile families.

Finally, South High was a patchwork quilt of ethnic and racial diversity. Ralph Conger, Central's longtime basketball coach, advised the Fords to send Jerry to South High, explaining "that's where he'll learn more about living." The school was populated by working- and middle-class youngsters from Italian, Polish, Syrian, and African-American backgrounds, as well as the predominant Dutch. Ford excelled in athletics and academics at South High. He was the first captain of the South High football team to earn a spot in the National Honor Society.

Ford joined the Boy Scouts of America in 1924 at age eleven. It is hard to exaggerate Scouting's influence on him. As an adult, he credited his five years in the scouts with instilling in him the qualities of self-discipline and the need for preparation. He was awarded 26 merit badges, which qualified him to become an Eagle Scout in 1927. This was one of the proudest moments of his life. Throughout his life, Ford tried to follow the Scout Law: "To help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

Becoming an Eagle Scout was also a turning point in his evolving sense of self. Although his mother identified him as J.K. (for King) Ford on his Eagle Scout certificate, it wasn't long before he was publicly introduced as Gerald R. Ford Jr. No formal adoption ever occurred. However, when Jerry turned twenty-one, he legally changed his name, which greatly pleased his parents.

5. The Depression hit Gerald Ford Sr. hard. He bought a paint business three weeks before the stock market crashed in 1929. When his bank closed, the DuPont Corporation, knowing Ford's record for paying his debts, wired him to keep ordering supplies and pay when he could. Rather than dismiss any of his ten employees, Ford Sr. called them in and said, "We can pay you five dollars a week to keep you in groceries, and that's what I'll pay myself. When times get better, we will make up the difference between the \$5 and your regular pay, however long it takes."

6. In high school, Ford played football and basketball and threw the discus and shotput for the track and field team. He also swam competitively for the Grand Rapids YMCA. Ford was an excellent football player, a center on offense and a linebacker on defense. In his senior year, South High won the Michigan state championship and Jerry was named to the All-State team.

A previous high school teammate told University of Michigan head football coach Harry Kipke about Ford, and Kipke wanted Jerry to come to Ann Arbor to play for him. However, there were two problems, both

caused by the Great Depression: The university had no money for football scholarships, and the Ford family had no money to send him to the university.

The solution had two parts. Kipke secured jobs for Ford waiting on tables in the interns' dining room of the university hospital and washing dishes in the nurses' cafeteria. Together, they generated \$1.50 a day, enough to feed an athlete in training but not enough to cover his \$100 tuition bill. The tuition money was provided by Arthur Krause, an administrator at South High, who channeled the profits of the school bookstore into a first-of-its-kind scholarship for Jerry. During the football season, Ford made a few dollars each game scalping game tickets supplied to players. He supplemented this income three or four times a year by selling his blood at the university hospital at the going rate of \$25 per transaction. His stepfather's sister and her husband, who had no children, sent him \$2 each week for spending money.

Standing in line to register for his freshman classes, Ford saw a face that was familiar from the sports pages of the Grand Rapids newspapers, and he went over to introduce himself. "I'm Jerry Ford. Aren't you Willis Ward from Detroit?" This is how a white football player from western Michigan first encountered the Black track and field star from the other side of the state. It was the start of a lifelong friendship whose historical impact would far exceed their athletic accomplishments.

7. In Ford's sophomore year, the University of Michigan Wolverines football team went undefeated, outscoring opponents 123 to 12 and winning the national championship. The spectacular play of All-American center Chuck Bernard limited Ford's playing time even before he injured his knee. "I wanted to play," Ford acknowledged later, "But you learn sitting on the bench. You learn patience, loyalty, and dedication. These things came in handy later." His junior year brought more of the same as Jerry alternated between left guard and occasionally substituting for Bernard at center.

In his senior year, Ford became the starting center and was selected as the team's Most Valuable Player – a rarity for a lineman. He was also named to the All-Big Ten team. However, the squad only won one game. But it was the lone victory that redeemed an otherwise awful season. In October 1934, the Wolverines were scheduled to play the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets. However, the Georgia Tech athletic director told the Michigan athletic director, Fielding Yost, that the Yellow Jackets would not take the field if Willis Ward, Michigan's only Black player, was allowed to play. Yost, the son of a Confederate soldier, readily agreed to exclude Ward. This behavior was typical of Yost; he had previously coached the Michigan football team for forty years and never had an African-American player.

Michigan coach Harry Kipke strongly disagreed with this decision. He had personally recruited Ward away from Dartmouth with a promise that his playing time would be determined by his play on the field, not the color of his skin. On the road, Kipke defied the custom whereby teams separately housed their Black players with sympathetic local families. He insisted that *all* his players be housed under the same roof. Left to his own devices, Kipke would have played Ward, but Yost was his boss, so the AD's decision stood. Fifteen hundred students and a handful of faculty members signed a petition calling for Willis to be allowed to play. The NAACP weighed in, and demonstrators threatened a sit-in at the fifty-yard line.

Ford was Ward's best friend on the team; he roomed with Willis on the road. Jerry's views on race were summarized succinctly by an African-American teammate from South High: "He was color blind. Gerald Ford was my brother." When he heard about Ward's exclusion, Ford was distraught and considered quitting the team in protest. He consulted with his stepfather, who urged him to reconsider.

Ward echoed this advice. Ford should play, said Ward, if only to avert a humiliating loss to a despised opponent. For Jerry, the most satisfying play of the game occurred when a trash-talking Tech linebacker taunted him, asking, "Where's your nigger player?" Ford's answer came in the form of a vicious double block he and Michigan guard Bill Borgmann delivered. The linebacker was carried off the field on a stretcher. After the game, Jerry told Willis, "That one was for you."

In 1999, several lawsuits challenged the University of Michigan's affirmative action admissions policies. Two cases eventually ended up before the U.S. Supreme Court. When the university president solicited support for the policies, the Michigan congressional delegation was no help, but Ford stepped up. He wrote an op-ed piece for the *New York Times* that was a highly personal account of the injustice inflicted upon Ward 65 years ago. Ford noted that the incident changed him and "led me to question how educational administrators could capitulate to raw prejudice." He added that his continual support for affirmative action on college campuses was rooted in his experiences with Ward. The Supreme Court upheld Michigan's affirmative action admission policy for its law school. It struck down its undergraduate formula with its points system explicitly weighted in favor of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

And the Ford-Ward connection did not end there. Following Ford's death in 2006, some Michigan admirers began a campaign to honor him with a statue in the U.S. Capitol. Given the limit of two such

commemorative figures per state, not everyone in the Michigan legislature was on board. Then Buzz Thomas, the Democratic floor leader in Michigan's Senate, stood and spoke of Ford and Ward and a friendship that was tested on the darkest day in the history of Michigan football. Thomas spoke with fire in his voice; he won over his colleagues, and the Ford statue was erected in the Capitol. Buzz Thomas was Willis Ward's grandson.

8. Ford's play on the football field garnered him national attention. All-American guard Rip Whalen of Northwestern said Jerry was "the best damn center I ever played against." Ford played in two prestigious all-star games: the College All-Star Game in Chicago and the East-West Shrine Game in San Francisco. After these games, he had offers to play professional football in the NFL from the Green Bay Packers and the Detroit Lions but declined them because he wanted to attend law school. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a double major (Economics and Political Science) and a B average in 1935.

Later in life, Ford was frank about college football's contributions to his character and career. He learned the benefits of teamwork and grueling preparation. Ford discovered that a good attitude is infectious and can generate extra effort that results in victory. He acquired the discipline to keep going when you are near exhaustion, to absorb defeat without yielding to defeatism, and to distinguish between constructive criticism and armchair quarterbacking. These things helped him when he went into politics. Beyond this, sports provided a lingua franca in place of conventional eloquence. Ford could talk sports at grip and grin sessions, and upon occasionally meeting another former accomplished athlete, he found that they were often like him: a competitor for whom ideology mattered less than getting the job done.

9. As graduation approached in the spring of 1935, Ford was determined to attend law school at the University of Michigan but had no way to pay for it. He asked his college coach, Harry Kipke, for a job as an assistant coach, but Kipke had no openings. However, he did the next best thing, recommending Jerry to Yale's new head football coach, Raymond "Ducky" Pond.

As it so happened, Pond's staff already included Ivan Williamson, captain of the Wolverine football team during Ford's sophomore year. Williamson knew Jerry well – he had been greatly impressed by Ford's stoic acceptance of his position as Chuck Bernard's backup. His strong endorsement led to an Ann Arbor lunch meeting between Pond and Ford and an invitation for Jerry to visit New Haven. In New Haven, Pond offered him a job with multiple responsibilities: assistant line coach for the varsity team, junior varsity head coach, and boxing team coach. (Ford knew nothing about boxing but was willing to learn.) Ford readily accepted.

This job was an extraordinary stroke of good luck. Coaching at Yale would be prestigious because the football program was excellent. The team was 6-1 in 1936 and 5-1-1 in 1937. End Larry Kelley won the Heisman Trophy in 1936, and halfback Clinton Frank won it in 1937. The salary (\$2,400 per year) was good for a recent college graduate – he could pay off his debts. More importantly, when he got to Yale, he took law classes as a part-time student and did well, which convinced the law school to admit him as a full-time student – while still coaching football – in 1939. Upon graduation, the law school dean ranked him in the top third of a distinguished class, which included two future Supreme Court justices, two future governors, a future secretary of state, a future U.S. senator, and the first director of the Peace Corps.

The years at Yale were invaluable to Ford. First, Yale broadened his view of the nation because his players and classmates came from all parts of America, not just the Midwest. Secondly, Yale tested him both mentally and physically. Since he was coaching and attending law school, he found it necessary to strictly organize his time – a trait he excelled at for the rest of his life. Lastly, coaching taught him how to lead a group of men.

10. Ford coached the junior varsity football team at Yale. Amongst his players were future U.S. Senator William Proxmire, future U.S. senator and presidential candidate Robert A. Taft Jr., and future Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Hersey. Proxmire said, "They [the players] saw in Coach Ford not only diligence but a first-rate mind." He also added: "He helped me. He knew how to get the best out of people and be pleasant at the same time." Taft said of Ford: "He didn't shout like some coaches. He was very calm and spoke to your intelligence. He taught you the basics: blocking and tackling. He told you how and showed you how." Hersey said, "I played football because I liked the game, and I learned from Coach Ford how to play my best."

11. Upon graduation from Yale Law School, Ford had offers from prestigious New York City and Philadelphia law firms, but he turned them all down. He was already thinking about a political career, and the place to pursue that would be his hometown, Grand Rapids.

There were personal consequences to this decision. Ford had been dating Phyllis Brown, a beautiful blonde supermodel, for four years. Brown appeared on *Cosmopolitan* covers, in a six-page picture story (with Ford) in *Life* magazine, and in fashion magazines and Coca-Cola ads. Phyllis was athletic; she and Jerry played

tennis and golf, skied, sailed, and loved to dance. But her career was in New York City, and she probably had no intention of going to Grand Rapids if asked, which she was not.

Ford had decided that marriage to Brown would be a mistake. "It was a wonderful romance, but it would never have been a good marriage. With all her wonderful traits, with all her terrific qualities of attractiveness and ability, she had a wandering eye," Ford later said. "It was her nature to be, well, gregarious, and somehow, I sensed that would not be good for a political wife. I guess we both had more sense than to think we could make a go at marriage." However, Brown's effect on Ford was long-lasting. She introduced him to music, art, and the theater; she showed him how to get away from the grind of work and study. She turned this "Midwest hayseed" – her term for Ford – into a fledgling member of the East Coast establishment.

12. In March 1941, Ford and Philip Buchen, a University of Michigan fraternity brother, started a law practice in Grand Rapids, each putting in \$1,000 to get it started. "I still don't know how we had the guts to do it," Ford said long after. "We didn't have a single client – not one client."

The two partners grew into their respective roles. Ford was the "outside man," joining organizations, making contacts, and using his athletic celebrity to attract clients. Buchen, whose mobility was limited due to a case of childhood polio, was the "inside man," minding the store, doing the research, and drafting the motions. They became successful quickly. Ford had chosen the right profession, the right partner, and the right city.

One Sunday morning, Ford was called to the county jail to represent a man who, while drunk, had injured several motorists in a multi-car accident. Ford spoke to the prosecutor, talked to the judge, and got them to suspend the man's sentence. Then, in return for this strenuous advocacy, "We never got paid," said Ford. This episode gave rise to Ford's First Rule of Legal Representation: "In criminal cases ... get the cash up front."

13. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the next day Ford volunteered for the Navy.

Jerry saw heavy combat (receiving eleven battle stars) as a gunnery officer on a small aircraft carrier, the USS *Monterey*, in the Pacific during World War II. His battle station was on the fantail of the ship, where he was in charge of fifteen men who manned 40-mm anti-aircraft guns. Ford was a calming influence on the gunners on the fantail. Seaman Second Class Ronald Smith said, "He was the sort of officer who looked out for his men. Nothing ever seemed to rattle him. One day, we came under attack, and I dived for cover in the hatchway. I looked up, and there was Lieutenant Ford. He smiled and asked me, 'Why the hell are you in such a hurry?'"

Later, Ford became the ship's assistant navigator. He said, "As a result, I became the officer of the deck during General Quarters, which meant I was on the bridge with the captain, the navigator, and the air officer during combat. Couldn't have had a better place to be; I was right there where everything was going on. That gave me a whole new appreciation of operations and the fleet in combat and of the war itself. It was good duty to be at the center of the action."

On the *Monterey*, Ford participated in over a dozen campaigns aimed at the shrinking perimeter of the Japanese empire, including battles at Saipan, Wake Island, Guam, and Formosa (Taiwan). The *Monterey* traveled more nautical miles than any other ship in the Pacific theater.

The war had a profound effect on Ford. "Before the war," Ford said, "I was a typical Midwest isolationist. I returned understanding we could never be isolated again. We were and are one world. It was clear to me, it was inevitable to me, that the country was obligated to lead in this new world. We had won the war. It was up to us to keep the peace."

14. In 1947, Bartel "Barney" Jonkman, Grand Rapids' congressman, strongly opposed aid to postwar Europe, calling the Marshall Plan "a boondoggle." In particular, he used his House seniority to propose amendments that would gut assistance to Greece, Turkey, Hungary, and Poland.

Ford thought this attitude was extraordinarily short-sighted and wanted to run against Jonkman in 1948, but it would not be easy. Jonkman was Dutch – with a Dutch name – in a Congressional district (Michigan's 5th) sixty percent Dutch. Moreover, Jonkman was part of Republican boss Frank McKay's political machine and had been re-elected four times by overwhelming majorities.

Phil Buchen suggested that Ford recruit Jack Stiles, their fraternity brother from the University of Michigan, as his campaign manager. Jerry and Jack collected the district's election returns for the previous decade and analyzed them carefully. Years later, Ford described the conclusions that they came to:

The contest would be in the primary. No Democrat could win that District in the general election. And

we came to the conclusion that Jonkman was beatable in a two-man primary, but not if he had more than one candidate against him. So, Jack and I laid out a campaign. There were three people more senior than I who we thought would be good congressmen and we thought might be willing to run. All were friends of mine, and one by one, in a very deliberate process, I went to see them.

All three men told Ford that Jonkman was unbeatable but that he [Ford] should run if he wanted to.

"Well," Jerry said, "that was exactly what I wanted them to say."

After he cleared the field for his straight shot at Jonkman, the filing date for the Republican primary was still almost a year away. Ford adopted a stealth strategy – he told virtually no one of his plan to run until the last possible moment to file his application. He said later, "My advantage was surprise. Barney seldom got back to the district. I wanted him to be overconfident." The strategy worked perfectly. According to Ford, "Barney Jonkman pooh-poohed my candidacy." In addition, Jonkman was forced to spend more time than usual in Washington because President Truman called a special session of Congress. Ford defeated Jonkman in a significant upset, 23,632 to 14,341. He won the general election in a landslide and was re-elected to the seat twelve times, always receiving more than sixty percent of the vote.

After the primary, but before the general election, Jerry married Betty Warren. Stiles and Buchen had persuaded him to schedule the wedding after the primary because marrying a divorcee might cost him votes among the church-going Dutch. Wait, they suggested, until after the primary; the general election would not be a problem because the district was so heavily Republican. Ford's sister-in-law told Betty at the wedding, "I want to warn you. Jerry's mistress will not be a woman. It will be his work."

15. As a freshman Congressman in 1948, Ford became friends with two other young Navy vets: Jack Kennedy and Dick Nixon. Kennedy's office was across the hall from Ford's, and they got acquainted walking from their distant offices to the House floor for votes. Ford said, "I found him a smart, attractive, decent, and honorable man. I liked Jack from the first."

Nixon introduced himself after Ford was sworn in, and they went on to become friends for life. They talked often. Ford said, "In political philosophy, we were about as close as two people could get." When Nixon became Vice President, he kept in touch with Ford and offered support for legislation Ford supported. But it wasn't until Nixon lost his 1962 race for governor of California that Nixon fully appreciated what a stand-up guy Jerry Ford was. Most Republicans at that time pronounced Nixon finished, and some enjoyed kicking him while he was down – but not Ford. "I kept in touch with Dick as a friend," Ford recalled. "I knew how lonely he could get. And when someone badmouthed him within my earshot, I spoke up. When Alger Hiss went on TV and started smearing Dick, I guess I spoke out." Nixon never forgot Ford's support.

16. Early in Ford's congressional career, Earl Michener, a fifteen-term congressman from southeast Michigan, gave him some good advice. He told Jerry that he could either be a "floor" man and learn how to handle debate, rules, and procedures or be a "committee" man and work hard behind the scenes. If it's the latter, Michener said, "Pick an area of your committee on which you want to become an expert. Learn more about that subject than anyone in the House of Representatives so that when you speak on it, people listen."

Jerry chose to be a committee man and worked hard on his initial committee assignment: Public Works. In his second year in the House, he got an extraordinary break. The only Michigan Republican on the House Appropriations Committee (HAC) gave up his seat to run for governor, and no other member from the state would give up seniority on his current committee to take the position. In addition, Jerry had befriended the committee chairman, so he got the spot. Inside the House, the thirty Democrats and twenty Republicans on Appropriations demanded particular respect because they held the ultimate power in any government: money. Ford said later, "And that was the greatest break in the world – to get on one of the best committees in the House before the end of my first term. Appropriations was where the power was, and I said to myself, 'That's going to be my specialty – how the government spends money.'"

With the election of Eisenhower in 1952, the Republicans gained control of the House and Senate, and Jerry got a second lucky break. The chairman of the HAC put him on the Defense Subcommittee; of the 435 members of the House, Ford became one of eleven subcommittee members making significant decisions about defense spending. Ford said, "The eleven of us on that subcommittee knew more about the military and its programs than most admirals or generals. The brass changed, but there was almost no turnover on the committee." The Defense Subcommittee Room became Jerry's favorite place; he spent more time there than in his House office or on the floor.

Throughout the 1950s, Ford was the quintessential Eisenhower Republican – conservative on fiscal matters and moderate to liberal on social issues. By 1964, Ford was the most senior Republican on the HAC.

17. Unlike his friends Jack Kennedy and Dick Nixon, Ford's lifelong ambition was to be Speaker of the House, not the president. The first step towards that goal occurred in 1963. The GOP was the minority party in the House, and it had three leadership positions: leader, whip, and chairman of the conference (a.k.a. the caucus). A group of younger members was dissatisfied with their leaders but did not have the votes to remove the leader or the whip. They were able to remove the chairman of the House Republican Conference, Iowa's Charles Hovey, and replace him with Gerald Ford. Hovey warned the remaining leaders: "I happened to be in the line of fire when the shooting started. They're really gunning for others, laying groundwork for another showdown two years hence."

Ford's admission to the GOP leadership had the paradoxical effect of raising his profile while narrowing his options by binding him to an increasingly conservative caucus. Henceforth, no matter how casually delivered, his words would be parsed as an expression of party sentiment.

18. The 1964 congressional elections were a disaster for the GOP. It lost 35 seats, giving the Democrats better than a two-thirds majority, 295 to 140. Young House Republicans revolted and replaced House Minority Leader Charles Halleck with Gerald Ford in early January 1965.

Jerry's new position meant changes for him and his family. He had to give up his top-ranking spot on the House Appropriations Committee. Furthermore, to grow the decimated GOP from 140 members to the 218 needed to elect a speaker would require more than one election cycle. Therefore, the leader's job would entail constantly traveling to elect new members and re-elect incumbents for several years. During the run-up to the 1966 midterm elections, Ford gave over two-hundred speeches in thirty-seven states.

Ford's constant travels exacerbated a preexisting problem at home. On August 14, 1964, Betty suffered a pinched nerve in her neck while trying to raise a stuck window at the Ford home in Alexandria, Virginia. She entered the hospital for a week's stay, but the doctors were unable to alleviate her pain through traction and physical therapy. They prescribed pain medication, which began her dependency on prescription drugs, the effects of which were magnified by alcohol. After her pinched nerve, she began to experience muscle spasms and numbness on the left side of her neck, both signs of neuropathy.

With Jerry constantly on the road, the care of the four Ford children fell entirely upon Betty, and she became more dependent upon her medications and began drinking more. One summer day in 1965, when Jerry was out sailing on the presidential yacht *Potomac*, Susan Ford found her mother at their house crying hysterically for reasons she could not articulate. Terrified, the young girl called out to Clara Powell, the Ford's maid, who managed to calm Betty down and contact Jerry. Betty said later, "I felt as though I was doing everything for everyone else and was not getting any attention at all."

Betty met with a psychiatrist weekly from August 1965 to April 1967. With the support of her family, she was able to resume her busy lifestyle. However, Betty had not managed to address her pain medication dependency, which was increasing. Nor did she modify her relationship with alcohol, which she, at the time, thought was typical consumption.

19. As House Minority Leader, Ford strove for cohesion and civility amongst the members of the Republican caucus. Rather than strong-arm its members into sticking to the party line, he accepted, within limits, differences of opinion within the caucus. It made more sense to him to accommodate his members' views than have them splintering apart into factions, so he let them speak their minds internally. In exchange, Ford wanted no bickering externally. Ford's open forum proved to be a smart strategy. Whenever he needed broad cooperation on significant votes, he could call on the goodwill that his nice-guy approach had accrued to bring his colleagues in line.

20. Right after Richard Nixon received the Republican nomination for president at the 1968 Republican National Convention, Ford was among those invited to the victor's suite at the Hilton Plaza Hotel to discuss possible running mates. "I know that in the past, Jerry, you have thought about being Vice President," Nixon observed. "Would you take it this year?" Ford declined with thanks – as Nixon fully intended him to – because if the GOP gained thirty-one seats in the upcoming election, he would become Speaker of the House.

Nixon then said he had been weighing a long list of qualified prospects, and a roundtable discussion ensued. When no one mentioned Nixon's favorite, Maryland governor Spiro Agnew, he proposed the name to the group. The suggestion was met by an awkward silence, which was suddenly pierced by Ford's high-pitched laughter – he thought it was a joke. Ford's aide Bob Hartmann said that H.R. Haldeman and the rest of Nixon's aides stared at Ford "as if he farted at the communion rail." Agnew got the nomination and became vice president.

In the early 1960s, farmland on the outskirts of Baltimore, Maryland, was being rapidly turned into housing

tracts, and developers with the right connections grew rich off public contracts. Matz, Childs, and Associates was such a firm, and their connection was the Baltimore County Chief Executive, Spiro Agnew. Starting in 1962, Agnew was paid 5 percent of the money Marz and Childs received on engineering contracts. On surveying jobs, the cost of doing business with him was a more modest 2.5 percent. The bribery scheme became even more lucrative when Agnew became governor, so much so that Marz and Childs had to invent creative accounting procedures to hide that they were paying him vast amounts of money. When Agnew became vice president, his influence over Maryland contracts ceased, but he did receive at least one \$10,000 payment in his vice-presidential office.

In 1973, Agnew was investigated by the U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland on charges of criminal conspiracy, bribery, extortion, and tax evasion. In October, after months of maintaining his innocence, he pled guilty to a single count of felony tax evasion. The presiding judge sentenced him to three years of unsupervised probation and a fine of \$10,000. He resigned from the vice presidency on October 10, 1973.

21. When the news of the Watergate burglary broke in the summer of 1972, Ford asked John Mitchell, one of Nixon's closest advisors, "Did you or the Nixon Campaign Committee have anything to do with the break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters?" Mitchell looked Ford in the eye and said, "Absolutely not!" Later, Nixon told Ford that he had nothing to do with the break-in or the cover-up. The truth was that Mitchell was heavily involved and that Nixon started the cover-up six days after the break-in.

22. According to the Twenty-fifth Amendment, Nixon had the power to choose a new vice president to replace Agnew, but both houses of Congress had to confirm his choice. Nixon wanted to nominate John Connally, who had recently changed his party allegiance from Democratic to Republican, but Democrats in Congress assured Nixon that Connally could not be confirmed. Nixon polled Republicans in both houses of Congress to get their preferences. The Senate had no consensus. In the House, Ford won in a landslide. Nixon then asked the two leading Democrats in Congress, Speaker of the House Carl Albert and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, for their opinions. Albert suggested Ford, and Mansfield agreed that would be a good choice. Nixon chose Ford because he had three strengths: (a) he shared Nixon's views on foreign policy and defense, (b) he was sure to be confirmed by both the House and Senate, and (c) he was an old friend whose loyalty could be trusted.

Nixon nominated Ford for vice president on October 13, 1973, with the Watergate scandal as a backdrop. One week later, the president performed the infamous Saturday Night Massacre. He caused Attorney General Elliot Richardson to resign when he demanded Richardson fire Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, which Richardson refused to do. Then, he fired Assistant Attorney General William Ruckelshaus when *he* refused to fire Cox. Then, he demanded that Solicitor General Robert Bork fire Cox, which he did. Members of Congress and the general public were appalled. Three days after the massacre, Speaker of the House Carl Albert directed the House Judiciary Committee to begin a formal inquiry into grounds for impeaching Richard Nixon.

Ford was confirmed overwhelmingly: 387 to 35 in the House and 92 to 3 in the Senate. He was sworn in as vice president on December 6, 1973. That evening, House Majority Leader Tip O'Neill – believing that Nixon would be impeached – said, "It was a very impressive ceremony. We won't see anything like it for maybe six or eight months." As vice president, Ford spent most of his time stumping across the country for the Republican cause, which at that point was the survival of Nixon's presidency.

23. Once Nixon heard the "smoking gun" audiotape, he realized that he would probably have to resign. He then called White House Counsel Fred Buzhardt into his office to devise a plan to shield him from prosecution. Buzhardt had been researching presidential pardons and told Nixon that the Supreme Court had explicitly ruled that a president can block the indictment and trial of any person by pardoning him before charges are brought.

Buzhardt suggested that Nixon could pardon himself, but Nixon indicated he would not do that. Instead, he asked a question: Could Ford, as the new president, pardon him? Buzhardt replied affirmatively. For Nixon, the next question was: Would Ford agree to a pardon in advance of Nixon's resignation?

Nixon decided that Ford might agree to a pardon if he were convinced that Nixon's resignation would be in the national interest. Nixon decided (a) to have Buzhardt outline the terms of a deal with Ford and (b) that Chief of Staff Alexander Haig – who knew Ford well – should present those terms to Ford. Nixon chose not to talk directly to Haig about it; each should be able to deny he had even discussed it with the other. As the President's counsel, Buzhardt would relay the Nixon proposal to Haig: Nixon would resign if Ford agreed in advance to pardon him.

However, since Haig was not a lawyer, Nixon thought Ford would be skeptical of Haig's legal knowledge of a president's pardon authority. So, he asked Buzhardt to put in writing the legal information that Ford would need to consider the proposal. Buzhardt wrote two pages on yellow legal paper for Haig to give Ford. The first set forth a lawyerly, half-page summary of a president's power to pardon a person before indictment or trial. The second, also in Buzhardt's handwriting, was a draft of a Ford pardon for Nixon.

The first was intended to convince Ford that he could pardon Nixon; the second would show Ford that a presidential pardon was technically simple. The form to be filled out was right there; all Ford would have to do was get it typed up, fill in the date, insert the name of Richard Nixon, and sign it.

Before seeing Ford, Haig discussed Nixon's options with Fred Buzhardt. The White House Counsel outlined six possible scenarios that could unfold and gave Haig the two sheets of yellow legal paper.

24. On August 1, 1974, Haig met with Ford and his chief of staff, Bob Hartmann, and told them of the "smoking gun" Watergate tape that proved Nixon's guilt. He did not discuss Nixon's options with them because he was wary of how Hartmann might react. Haig met alone with Ford later that day and outlined six possible scenarios that could unfold, saving the preferred one for last. Nixon could (a) do nothing and let the judicial process take its course, or (b) wage a bitter, protracted campaign to stay in office, or (c) step aside temporarily, under the Twenty-fifth Amendment, and reclaim power depending on the outcome of his case, or (d) agitate for a less severe punishment than impeachment, perhaps formal censure, or (e) issue pardons for himself and all those accused of Watergate crimes and then resign, or (f) resign his office in return for an agreement that Ford would pardon him. Haig then handed Buzhardt's two pages to Ford.

Haig emphasized that he was not a lawyer and had no part in formulating the options but had been instructed to present them to Ford. Then, after disclaiming any position of his own, Haig asked Ford if he had any recommendation as to what Nixon should do. Ford said, "Al, I will need some time to think about this. I want to talk to St. Clair [one of Nixon's lawyers]. I want to talk to my wife before giving any response." He would, he added, give Haig an answer soon.

After he met with Haig, Ford described the meeting – including the six options – to Bob Hartmann. The mere mention of a pardon caused Hartmann to explode.

"Jesus!" he exclaimed. "What did you tell him?"

"I didn't tell him anything. I told him I needed time to think it over," explained Ford.

"You what?" Hartmann distrusted both Haig and Nixon. He accurately envisioned the long arm of Richard Nixon reaching out to manipulate the emotions of his loyal-to-a-fault vice president. Jerry discussed the matter with Betty that evening and others he trusted the next morning. Then, he called Haig to clarify that he wanted no part in formulating Nixon's course of action, especially regarding the president's resignation, and that no assumption should be made about a pardon from Ford.

25. Richard Nixon resigned the night of August 8, 1974. The next day, Ford was sworn in as the 38th President in the White House East Room. He delivered a short but nearly pitch-perfect inaugural address written by Hartmann. Ford said, in part:

I assume the Presidency under extraordinary circumstances never before experienced by Americans. This is an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts.

Therefore, I feel it is my first duty to make an unprecedented compact with my countrymen. Not an inaugural address, not a fireside chat, not a campaign speech – just a little straight talk among friends. And I intend it to be the first of many.

I am acutely aware that you have not elected me as your President with your ballots, and so I ask you to confirm me as your president in your prayers. ...

If you have not chosen me by secret ballot, neither have I gained office by any secret promises. I have not campaigned for either the Presidency or the Vice Presidency. I have not subscribed to any partisan platform. I am indebted to no man, and only one woman – my dear wife – as I begin this very difficult job.

I have not sought this enormous responsibility, but I will not shirk it. Those who nominated me and confirmed me were my friends and are my friends. They were of both parties, elected by all the people and acting under the Constitution in their name. It is fitting that I should pledge to them and to you that I will be the President of all the people. ...

My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over.

Our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule.

26. One of the most important initial decisions Ford had to make was his choice for Vice President. There were three viable candidates: (a) George H. W. Bush, who had the most support amongst the GOP establishment (state chairmen, national committeemen, etc.); (b) Ronald Reagan, the leader of the right wing of the party; and (c) Nelson Rockefeller, the leader of the progressive/moderate wing of the party. In describing how he made the decision, Ford said:

I had the feeling that in my own situation as President, my background, the way I came in, I needed the strongest possible, the most highly effective person at my side. That immediately ruled out Reagan. It didn't rule out George Bush, but when you compare his experience to what I needed, he didn't equal Nelson Rockefeller.

Ford nominated Rockefeller for vice president on August 20, 1974. The Senate voted 90 to 7 to confirm Rockefeller; the House vote was 287 to 128.

27. Even though Nixon was gone, questions about his legal status remained – about one-fourth of the questions at Ford's first presidential press conference on August 28, 1974, were related to Nixon's legal plight. The questions infuriated Ford – he wanted to talk about his plans for the country. Afterward, he concluded that if he wanted to move America forward, he needed to do something to put Watergate behind him.

Two days later, he called Alexander Haig and his three closest and most trusted advisors – Phil Buchen, Bob Hartmann, and Jack Marsh – into his office and swore them all to secrecy regarding what they would be discussing. Then he said, “I am very much inclined to grant Nixon immunity from further prosecution.” Hartmann and Marsh believed it would be a mistake to grant the pardon now, but Buchen – who had known Ford for thirty years – recognized that the president's mind was made up. Therefore, he suggested: “We ought to get Mr. Nixon to settle his papers at the same time because you're giving this guy a great thing We also ought to get a real statement of contrition when he accepts the pardon.”

Ford then made a huge mistake. He said, “Phil, do what you can to get both those things, but for God's sake don't let either one stand in the way of my granting the pardon.” This statement was a mistake because subsequently Haig violated his oath to secrecy and leaked the contents of the meeting to Nixon, which meant that Nixon knew he did not have to admit guilt in order to get the pardon.

Benton Becker flew to California to negotiate with Nixon's representatives on behalf of Ford. After much discussion, Nixon agreed to a statement, “I was wrong in not dealing with Watergate more forthrightly and directly, particularly when it reached the judicial stage.” To a lawyer like Becker, this sentence affirmed Nixon's complicity in the obstruction of justice. However, the language struck nonlawyers as opaque and evasive. Ford, pressed in later years to identify anything he would do differently, said he should have insisted on a more forthright statement of contrition from Nixon.

On September 8, 1974, Gerald Ford granted “a full, free and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States ... he ... may have committed.” Nixon never admitted guilt, except for the statement secured from him by Becker.

Before Ford announced the pardon on national television, his press secretary, Jerry terHorst, handed the president his letter of resignation. In it, he said he could not support the pardon of Nixon “even before he has been charged with the commission of any crime.” “Try as I can,” wrote terHorst, “it is impossible to conclude that the former President is more deserving of mercy than persons of lesser stations in life whose offenses have had far less effect on our national well-being,” e.g., men who evaded the Vietnam War draft, or Nixon's aides who were already in prison.

28. The pardon was highly controversial because a large segment of the population wanted to see Nixon punished, especially Democrats, who felt that his dirty tricks had stolen the 1972 presidential election. However, another segment of the public thought that the pardon was the right thing to do because it was the best way for America to put questions about Nixon behind it and to heal. Legally, once a person accepts a pardon, as Nixon did, that is an admission of guilt. Hence, the grant of the pardon did not carry with it any presumption of innocence.

Nevertheless, the pardon was unacceptable to many people. Republican Senator Barry Goldwater insisted that Nixon be tried and told Ford, “He [Nixon] may be clear in your eyes, but he's not clear in mine.” Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy called the pardon an unforgivable “betrayal of the public trust.” Ford's friend, House Majority Leader Tip O'Neill, said, “You're crazy. I'm telling you right now, this will cost you the election. I hope it's not part of any deal.”

Senator Sam Ervin, the Senate Watergate Committee chairman, said, “President Ford ought to have

allowed the legal processes to take their course and not issued any pardon to former President Nixon until he had been indicted, tried, and convicted.” The American Civil Liberties Union condemned the pardon: “If Ford’s principle had been the rule in Nuremberg, the Nazi leaders would have been let off, and only the people who carried out their schemes would have been tried.” The *Washington Post* said the pardon’s effect is “nothing less than the continuation of the cover-up.”

Politically speaking, the pardon was a gift to the Democratic Party. In the 1974 midterm elections, the Democrats gained forty-nine seats in the House and four in the Senate, giving them a veto-proof two-thirds majority in the former and a 61 to 37 majority in the latter. (Two senators were neither Democrats nor Republicans.) Many Republicans blamed the election debacle on Ford’s pardon. House Republican Minority Leader John Rhodes said to Ford, “Goddam it, Jerry, why couldn’t you have at least waited until after the election?”

29. On September 16, 1974, Ford announced his Return of Vietnam Era Draft Evaders and Military Deserters policy. The policy had two parts. Those not convicted of an offense were granted amnesty in return for two years of public service. A clemency board was established to deal with those already convicted. The board adjusted the requirements to be fulfilled for amnesty based on the severity of the offense. Full pardon for draft evaders was granted during the Carter administration.

30. In September 1974, Betty Ford went in for a routine physical exam, and her physician found a lump in her right breast. A surgeon examined Betty, and he confirmed the existence of the lump. Surgery was performed; the surgeon found that the growth was malignant, and a radical mastectomy was performed.

The operation to remove Betty’s right breast and the underlying chest muscles was successful. However, subsequent tests revealed that three of the thirty lymph nodes removed as part of the radical mastectomy were cancerous. That made her a Stage 2 cancer patient with a 50 percent chance of surviving five years. She took prescribed medication – bottled chemotherapy – for two years and underwent strenuous rounds of physical therapy to regain the use of her right hand and arm.

Mrs. Ford’s bout with cancer was well-publicized, and she chose to be open and honest with the public about her breast exam and mastectomy, which prompted many women to learn from her experience. Hospitals and clinics across the country reported an unprecedented number of women coming in for breast exams. No statistics exist, but doctors estimate thousands of lives may have been saved because of Betty Ford’s openness and candor.

31. According to the Paris Peace Accords signed on January 27, 1973, North Vietnam agreed to cease offensives against South Vietnam, and the U.S. agreed to withdraw all its forces from South Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese had no intention of abiding by this; they had correctly calculated that once the Americans were out of Vietnam, they would have no stomach for returning.

After the Paris agreement, the North Vietnam forces in South Vietnam were heavily resupplied by the U.S.S.R. and the People’s Republic of China, and their numbers far exceeded the 150,000 allowed by the Paris agreement. Also, North Vietnam’s engineers rebuilt the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which passed through Laos and Cambodia, into a modern all-weather supply artery.

On January 6, 1975, North Vietnamese forces launched a major offensive against South Vietnam. Ford asked Congress for funds to help the South Vietnamese, but Congress refused. South Vietnam fell in April 1975.

32. Gerald Ford was notoriously frugal. After all, he had come of age during the Great Depression, seen his parents lose their beautiful house in East Grand Rapids, and had scrimped and saved to pay his way through the University of Michigan. For fifteen years, he fought for fiscal restraint as a member of the House Appropriations Committee. When he was president, a humorous story made the rounds of the capital. In it, two Washington lawyers are marooned on a desert island and afraid they will never be rescued. One lawyer says to the other, “I feel bad about this. I just borrowed \$30 from Jerry Ford, and now I’ll never be able to repay him.” The other lawyer replies, “Oh, thank God, we’re saved! If you owe Jerry \$30, he’ll find you.”

John Hersey was a Pulitzer Prize-winning author who was coached by Ford at Yale. In January 1975, Ford allowed Hersey to follow him in his daily activities for five-and-a-half days. The only meetings Hersey was not permitted to attend were Ford’s daily one-on-one foreign policy meetings with Henry Kissinger. In his book *The President: A Minute-by-Minute Account of a Week in the Life of Gerald Ford*, Hersey paints an interesting picture of Ford as an energetic, well-prepared, hard-working, open, and thoughtful man who is tight-fisted regarding government spending. For example, after Ford harshly criticized a Democratic jobs proposal,

Hersey was dismayed. "I have seen the first glimpse of another side of the man who has been so considerate, so open, and so kind to me as an individual – what seems a deep, hard, rigid side."

33. Ford's training was as a legislator, not an executive. Before becoming vice president, he was never a governor or senator with statewide responsibilities; he represented the approximately half-million people of Michigan's 5th Congressional District. Consequently, his modus operandi was not that of a forceful, proactive president: have a vision, sell it to the American people, and then push it through Congress. He dealt with issues as they arose and negotiated with Congress while still sticking to his beliefs. Bill Seidman, a friend from Grand Rapids who was Ford's Assistant to the President for Economic Affairs, said, "Ford just wasn't a theme type of man. He wasn't someone who attempted to sell things by packaging them for the media." Seidman felt the president "was issue reactive. He wasn't an initiator."

Ford had to deal with large Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate. Congress was more willing to spend money than he was, and he vetoed many non-military appropriations bills. Ford vetoed legislation at a much higher rate than the other presidents of his era: 66 vetoes in his approximately 2.5 years in office. In contrast, JFK vetoed 21 bills in 3 years; LBJ 30 bills in 5 years; Nixon 43 bills in 6.5 years; and Carter 31 bills in 4 years. Ford's vetoes were overridden 12 times.

34. One issue on which Ford was proactive was the deregulation of transportation industries. The credit for deregulation has primarily been assigned to the Carter and Reagan administrations, but Ford was first out of the gate, when resistance to change was the most entrenched.

In the twenty-first century, when market forces dominate and technology has erased national borders, it is hard to believe that as recently as 1974, Washington regulators determined airfares and airline schedules, dictated which routes truckers could travel, denied crumbling railroads flexibility in setting rates, and kept long-distance phone rates unreasonably high to subsidize local service. The U.S. Postal Service enjoyed a monopoly over the delivery of first-class mail. "Most regulated industries have become federal protectorates," charged Federal Trade Commission chairman Lewis Engman, "Living in a cozy world of cost-plus, safely protected from the ugly specters of competition, efficiency, and innovation."

The Ford administration began deregulating the railroad industry, the airline and airfreight industries, and the trucking industry. Its Railroad Regulation and Regulatory Reform Act provided ailing lines with pricing flexibility and the freedom to abandon unprofitable routes. A Ford-appointed head of the Civil Aeronautics Board routinely granted requests for lower airfares and loosened the restrictions on air freight carriers. When the Carter administration deregulated the air freight industry in 1977, FedEx and others began providing overnight delivery services.

35. Ford attended the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Helsinki in August 1975. The resulting treaty, the Helsinki Accords, was signed by the U.S., the U.S.S.R., Canada, and most European countries. In the agreement, the signers agreed to honor human rights, cooperate in humanitarian, scientific, and economic affairs, and adhere to the post-World War II national boundaries in Europe.

The Helsinki Accords were Ford's most significant achievement in foreign affairs, and an argument can be made that it was the beginning of the end for the Soviet Empire. According to Ford, "that human rights provision was the catalyst that brought about the demise of the Soviet Union because it gave inspiration and justification to the dissidents in the Soviet Union. The provision justified the dissidents doing everything they could to throw the bastards out. We got it started; then Jimmy Carter carried it on."

The right wing of the GOP did not agree that the Accords were a good thing. To them, the validation of the post-World War II national boundaries in Europe confirmed the Soviet Union's ill-gotten Iron Curtain territorial gains achieved at the end of the World War II when Stalin reneged on his promise at Yalta to hold democratic elections in the Eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army. Conservative Republicans, in particular Ronald Reagan, compared the Helsinki Accords to FDR's Yalta "surrender."

36. By late October 1975, Ford's 1976 presidential campaign was gaining support and getting organized when a problem arose. Wherever Ford went – New Hampshire, Florida, California, Illinois, Texas – conservative party officials and prospective delegates insisted that Rockefeller was too liberal and must be dropped from the ticket. Ford studied a nationwide poll and shook his head in dismay at its results: one in four Republicans would not vote for him if Rockefeller remained on the ticket.

Rockefeller had told Ford previously that he would bow out if it would help Ford get the nomination; Ford asked him to do so, and Rockefeller complied. Ford said that it was one of the toughest things he ever had to do, and many people felt it was wrong because Rockefeller had worked hard and been very loyal to Ford. In particular, Betty Ford told him in private, "Jerry, you're a damn fool to do this." Later, Ford said, "It was the

biggest political mistake of my life. And it was one of the few cowardly things I did in my life.”

37. In November 1975, Ronald Reagan announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination for president. Consequently, in the spring of 1976, instead of building momentum for his campaign based on his accomplishments, Ford spent too much time responding to Reagan's endless barbs on issue after issue, especially foreign policy. Reagan railed against the “Kissinger-Ford” foreign policy – negotiating with the Soviets on arms control, signing the Helsinki Accords, and, presumably, a willingness to give away the Panama Canal.

Reagan arrived at the Republican National Convention neck-and-neck with Ford, but the president's support amongst uncommitted delegates enabled him to eke out a 1,187 to 1,070 first-ballot victory. When Ford gave his acceptance speech, it was well-received, and Ronald and Nancy Reagan were listening from a skybox. Swept up in the feeling of triumph, Ford waved to Reagan and motioned to him to come down. Since his primacy was established, Ford hoped the moment would demonstrate party unity. The crowd roared.

Reagan indicated he was not coming down, but the crowd wanted him to appear. People were yelling, “Speech, speech.” Ford said over the public address system, “Ron, would you come down and bring Nancy?”

Reagan came down and gave an impromptu, six-minute speech better than Ford's prepared address. Reagan talked about the stakes for the convention and the country, asking Republicans to think of themselves as future generations would see them. He said, in part:

Will they look back with appreciation and say, ‘Thank God for those people in 1976 who headed off our loss of freedom? Who kept us now a hundred years later free? Who kept our world from nuclear destruction?’ ... This is our challenge, and this is why here in this hall tonight, better than we’ve done before, we’ve got to quit talking to each other and about each other and go out and communicate to the world that we may be fewer in numbers than we’ve ever been, but we carry the message they’re waiting for. We must go forth from here united, determined that what a great general said a few years ago is true: There is no substitute for victory.

There were reports that delegates wept. *ABC News* reporter Sam Donaldson said that this was “the first real emotion of the night,” and it “wasn’t for the ticket, but for the man who wasn’t on it.” One Ford delegate exclaimed, “Oh my God, we’ve nominated the wrong man.” Journalist Fred Barnes wrote, “In the time it took Reagan to speak, the Republican Party escaped the clutches of its moderate establishment and fell into Reagan’s lap. He lost the nomination but won the party.”

38. In 1976, the electorate was looking for a candidate who was the opposite of Richard Nixon: someone honest, open, trustworthy, and forthright. Both Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter had those virtues, so other issues came into play. Some voters never forgave Ford for pardoning Richard Nixon. Some voters, especially New Yorkers, felt that dropping Nelson Rockefeller from the ticket to appease the right wing was disloyal. Some New Yorkers thought Ford had abandoned them by refusing to bail out New York City during its 1975 financial crisis. Other voters were appalled at the terrible gaff Ford committed during the second presidential debate when he asserted that “there is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe” when everyone knew better. And, of course, he did not have the wholehearted support of the right wing of the GOP.

Carter won the popular vote 40.8 million to 39.1 million and the electoral college vote 297 to 240. Ford would have won the election if he had won New York (41 electoral votes). Alternatively, a switch of fewer than 9,000 votes in Ohio and Hawaii would have changed the outcome. Initially, Ford took the defeat hard. He said, “I can’t believe I lost to a peanut farmer,” but he quickly recovered. Carter was magnanimous in victory. During his inaugural address, the new president said, referring to the Nixon pardon, “I want to thank my predecessor for all he did to heal our land.” Carter then walked over to Ford and shook his hand before resuming his address.

39. Decades later, Ford was still miffed by Reagan's decision to challenge him in 1976. To Ford, that made a mockery of Reagan's famous Eleventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not speak ill of any fellow Republican.” Ford said, “I was shocked when he called me in November of 1975 and said he was going to run. I thought, ‘What a low-down stunt.’ ... I thought that I had done a good job, and I thought that a Reagan challenge would make it more difficult if I won [the nomination] to win the general election. What also irritated me, after I beat him, ... was that he snubbed me... He made only one appearance on my behalf. ... He endorsed me. But in a lukewarm way. There was no question in my mind that if he had campaigned for me in Mississippi, Wisconsin, and Missouri, I could have beat Carter. Three or four states were lost by one or two percent. He

wasn't a party player that year. It was all about himself."

40. Jerry Ford and Jimmy Carter became friends while flying back from Anwar Sadat's funeral in 1981. Cooped up in a Boeing 707, Ford and Carter decided to become friends and partners in the space of a few hours. This reconciliation did not require intermediaries – as it had for Kennedy and Nixon – and did not require weeks of behind-the-scenes negotiations as it had for Hoover and Truman. They did it themselves in the cramped forward cabin of the plane that had been Air Force One during their presidencies. Although one was an easygoing former jock and the other was an uptight former nuclear engineer, they found that they had a lot in common. Each had been an unexpected president; each had been tossed out by the voters; each had just had a heavy dose of Richard Nixon on the flight to Egypt; and each blamed Ronald Reagan for his defeat.

Ford and Carter teamed up on dozens of projects over the next twenty-five years. They co-authored a *Reader's Digest* article critical of Israel in 1983, joined forces to lobby for the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993, and teamed up to oppose a plan to legalize drugs in California in 1996. Most remarkably, they agreed that whoever died first would be eulogized by the other, which Carter did for Ford in 2006.

41. While Ford was president, Betty used prescription drugs and alcohol to relieve pain from her pinched nerve. Over time, her dependency increased, and in 1978 she entered the U.S. Navy's Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Hospital in Long Beach, California. With her usual openness and candor, Mrs. Ford made this decision public.

After she recovered, Betty decided that there was a pressing need for a facility where others could benefit from the kind of care she had received. In 1982, with Jerry's encouragement and financial support from their friend Leonard Firestone, she co-founded the Betty Ford Center (BFC) in Rancho Mirage, California, a nonprofit hospital for the treatment of those addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. At the time of her death in 2011, the BFC had helped more than 90,000 women and men recover from addiction. Some were well-known, but the majority were not. Betty said, "I wanted this to be a place for the Chicago taxi driver as well as the celebrity." The BFC currently has 100 inpatient beds and additional facilities for residential day treatment clients.

42. Gerald Ford received the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award in 2001 for his pardon of Richard Nixon.

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