

## ***THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION***

***Classroom: Grades 9-12***

***Presidential Transitions: "The Torch is Passed"***

***Activity - Meet the Press: Gerald Ford and the Repercussions of Pardoning Nixon***



***President Nixon and Vice-President Ford in the Oval Office - The Nixon Presidential Materials***

Background President Richard M. Nixon resigned from office on August 9, 1974. He did so because he knew that if he remained, the House of Representatives would find him guilty of impeachable offenses and the Senate would convict him of those charges. Though he resigned to avoid this "official" fate, he was still liable and subject to indictment, trial, judgment, and punishment in federal courts for federal crimes he committed during his tenure in office. On Sunday, September 8, 1974, Gerald R. Ford went before a television audience and pardoned former President Richard M. Nixon "for offenses against the United States." The U.S. Constitution provides the president the power to grant pardons:

... "he shall have power to grant reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment."

(Article II, Section 2)

### *Step 1*

1. Read Ford's Pardon of Nixon, and then Ford's Pardon Remarks.
2. Write a list of all the reasons Ford gave for pardoning Nixon, leaving six or seven lines between each reason, so you can add further supporting information later in the activity.
3. After reading the pardon speech, write a reaction paragraph, noting if you accept his rationale, or have serious problems with it.

Read the letter written to Ford's counsel by Leon Jaworski, the Watergate special prosecutor (click the thumbnail to the left). Notice the date on the letter is September 4, 1974. After reading the letter, would you revise anything you wrote in your reaction paragraph? Why or why not?

4. President Ford announced the pardon around midday on a Sunday. Why do you think he chose this time to make his announcement? Why not during the regular work week at the White House? Record a brief response.

### *Step 2*

Now you will have an opportunity to read the transcript of the first press conference conducted by President Ford after pardoning Nixon. Keep in mind that presidents have been holding formal press conferences at the White House since the time of Woodrow Wilson. Reporters and other media commentators, representing the various news services and agencies, are able to ask the president questions. Though being barraged with questions can be unnerving for the president, press conferences have continued because the chief executive finds them helpful. They give him an opportunity to explain himself and his policies; they are the closest the president comes to "having a conversation with the people." They also give him an opportunity to discover the concerns of the American people.

1. Read a transcript of President Ford's Press Conference, September 13, 1974.
2. Did anything President Ford say during the press conference give you a better understanding of the reasons for the pardon he outlined in his remarks on September 8? If so, write the added information in the spaces you left open on your list.
3. During the presidential press conference, did President Ford mention new reasons for the pardon that did not come up in his first remarks on September 8? If so, record those in your notes.

4. During press conferences, as noted above, the president finds out what is troubling the people through the issues raised by the press. What are the greatest concerns the reporters and commentators have about Ford's pardon? Make a list on your paper.
5. Ford responded to the concerns expressed by the journalists. Write down one answer he provided that seems most convincing and another that seems weak.
6. Write down any issue besides the pardon that was discussed in the press conference. Estimate how much of the press conference time was taken up by these questions. What can you infer about the impact of the pardon debate on the other issues the president needs to address? Write a brief reaction.

### *Step 3*

Using the information you gathered in Steps 1 and 2, complete one or more of the following activities:

1. Pretend you are a commentator with a newspaper syndicate. You are writing an editorial to appear in the newspaper on September 14, 1974. Using the information provided by Ford's speech and what you were able to get from the press conference, take a position on the president's action. Keep in mind that in writing an editorial, you are freed from the burden of objectivity, but you do want to persuade your reader. To be convincing you need to develop a clear logic chain, along with powerful metaphors and analogies. For example, George F. Will opened his Washington Post op-ed piece on September 10, 1974, with:

"Man" said Robert Louis Stevenson "is a creature who lives not by bread alone, but principally by catchwords." Americans will have to eat more bread now that President Ford has drained the nutritional value from the catchwords about "equal justice under the law."

Bring your editorial to class and read it with great conviction!

2. Using the information you gathered in Steps 1 and 2, draw a political cartoon either in defense of President Ford or in support of those who believe he subverted "equal justice under the law" in granting the pardon. Be sure the reader will be able to identify the people you want to portray in your cartoon, and consider using recognized symbols as a means of getting your point across. Display your cartoon on the classroom bulletin board. Ask some of your classmates to interpret the cartoon so you can see how well you conveyed your message.

3. During President Ford's press conference, several subjects came up that you and your classmates might have questions about. Do some quick research on one of the topics, and give a brief report to your class. Subjects might include: the granting of amnesty to Vietnam War draft-dodgers; the question of what would be done with Nixon's presidential tapes and papers; the Chilean coup; or the status of others who were charged with Watergate-related crimes.
4. Using public library or Internet resources, find an article written by any one of the reporters identified in the Ford press conference. Review the article he or she wrote, most likely based on the press conference, and see what "spin" was put on the president's remarks. After you analyze the article, share your findings with the class, and post the article for others to read.
5. After reading and collecting information in Steps 1 and 2, think about this argument made by President Ford that President Nixon not stand trial for crimes against the United States: "During this long period of delay and potential litigation, ugly passions would again be aroused. And our people would again be polarized in their opinions. And the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and aboard."

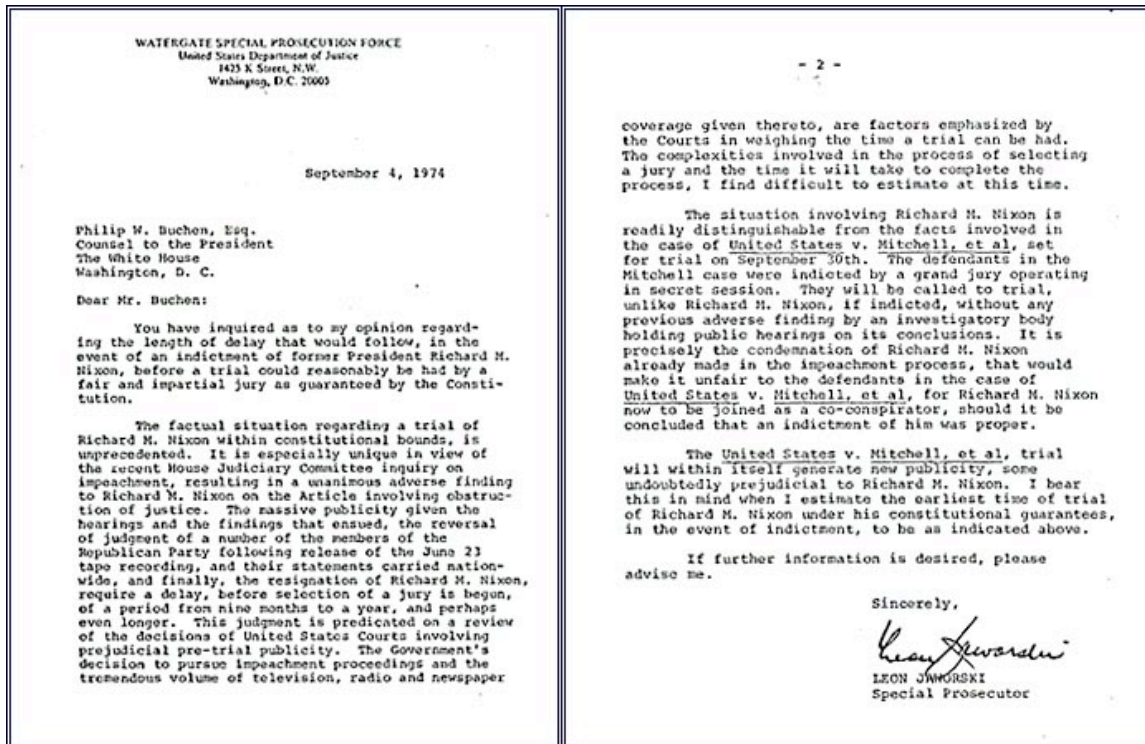
President William Clinton is the first American president to testify before a grand jury on possible criminal charges. Moreover, the House of Representatives eventually called his performance into question on four articles of impeachment relating to the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky scandals, including perjury in the grand jury hearing. Clinton was impeached, tried by the Senate on two of those charges, and acquitted. For over a year the details of these scandals overpowered almost all other activities in Washington.

Using articles from *Time*, *Newsweek*, or other periodicals from the time just after Clinton's acquittal (check late February 1999), see if writers seem concerned that the credibility and reputation of the United States government will suffer permanently because of the Clinton scandals. Cut out and summarize at least three articles in support of that idea, then set them aside.

Interview five or six adults to get their opinion as to how much the Clinton scandals affect them now. Do they think about them very much? Do they read about them in the papers? Can they still remember all of the players? Do the scandals affect their voting decisions? Do they think the country was able to absorb the blows of a president's "impeachable" offenses, or is there still damaging fallout? Do they think Ford's fears that the nation couldn't take the trauma of such events to be legitimate? Draw some conclusions from your limited data. Using the results, together with the three articles, share some compare-and-contrast conclusions with classmates, including what your research revealed about the validity of Ford's statement.

6. Suppose you are a parent in 1974. Your ten-year-old daughter comes home from school and says, "My teacher said some people accused President Nixon of some bad things. He was supposed to go to court, and the jury was going to decide if he really did do those things, but President Ford decided to let him go. Why is that, mom?"

Using the information from Ford's remarks, and press conference responses, explain the president's rationale so a ten-year-old would understand it.



*Leon Jaworski's letter*

*President Gerald R. Ford's Proclamation 4311, Granting a Pardon to Richard Nixon  
September 8, 1974*

By the President of the United States of America a Proclamation

Richard Nixon became the thirty-seventh President of the United States on January 20, 1969 and was reelected in 1972 for a second term by the electors of forty-nine of the fifty states. His term in office continued until his resignation on August 9, 1974.

Pursuant to resolutions of the House of Representatives, its Committee on the Judiciary conducted an inquiry and investigation on the impeachment of the President extending over more than eight months. The hearings of the Committee and its deliberations, which received wide national publicity over television, radio, and in printed media, resulted in votes adverse to Richard Nixon on recommended Articles of Impeachment.

As a result of certain acts or omissions occurring before his resignation from the Office of President, Richard Nixon has become liable to possible indictment and trial for offenses against the United States. Whether or not he shall be so prosecuted depends on findings of the appropriate grand jury and on the discretion of the authorized prosecutor. Should an indictment ensue, the accused shall then be entitled to a fair trial by an impartial jury, as guaranteed to every individual by the Constitution.

It is believed that a trial of Richard Nixon, if it became necessary, could not fairly begin until a year or more has elapsed. In the meantime, the tranquility to which this nation has been restored by the events of recent weeks could be irreparably lost by the prospects of bringing to trial a former President of the United States. The prospects of such trial will cause prolonged and divisive debate over the propriety of exposing to further punishment and degradation a man who has already paid the unprecedented penalty of relinquishing the highest elective office of the United States.

Now, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States, pursuant to the pardon power conferred upon me by Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution, have granted and by these presents do grant a full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in during the period from January 20, 1969 through August 9, 1974.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and seventy-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and ninety-ninth.

GERALD R. FORD

SOURCE: Gerald R. Ford Library

*President Gerald R. Ford's Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Granting Pardon to Richard Nixon September 8, 1974*

Ladies and gentlemen:

I have come to a decision which I felt I should tell you and all of my fellow American citizens, as soon as I was certain in my own mind and in my own conscience that it is the right thing to do.

I have learned already in this office that the difficult decisions always come to this desk. I must admit that many of them do not look at all the same as the hypothetical questions that I have answered freely and perhaps too fast on previous occasions.

My customary policy is to try and get all the facts and to consider the opinions of my countrymen and to take counsel with my most valued friends. But these seldom agree, and in the end, the decision is mine.

To procrastinate, to agonize, and to wait for a more favorable turn of events that may never come or more compelling external pressures that may as well be wrong as right, is itself a decision of sorts and a weak and potentially dangerous course for a President to follow.

I have promised to uphold the Constitution, to do what is right as God gives me to see the right, and to do the very best that I can for America.

I have asked your help and your prayers, not only when I became President but many times since. The Constitution is the supreme law of our land and it governs our actions as citizens. Only the laws of God, which govern our consciences, are superior to it.

As we are a nation under God, so I am sworn to uphold our laws with the help of God. And I have sought such guidance and searched my own conscience with special diligence to determine the right thing for me to do with respect to my predecessor in this place, Richard Nixon, and his loyal wife and family.

Theirs is an American tragedy in which we all have played a part. It could go on and on and on, or someone must write the end to it. I have concluded that only I can do that, and if I can, I must.

There are no historic or legal precedents to which I can turn in this matter, none that precisely fit the circumstances of a private citizen who has resigned the Presidency of the United States. But it is common knowledge that serious allegations and accusations hang like a sword over our former President's head, threatening his health as he tries to reshape his life, a great part of which was spent in the service of this country and by the mandate of its people.

After years of bitter controversy and divisive national debate, I have been advised, and I am compelled to conclude that many months and perhaps more years will have to pass before Richard Nixon could obtain a fair trial by jury in any jurisdiction of the United States under governing decisions of the Supreme Court.

I deeply believe in equal justice for all Americans, whatever their station or former station. The law, whether human or divine, is no respecter of persons; but the law is a respecter of reality.

The facts, as I see them, are that a former President of the United States, instead of enjoying equal treatment with any other citizen accused of violating the law, would be cruelly and excessively penalized either in preserving the presumption of his innocence or in obtaining a speedy determination of his guilt in order to repay a legal debt to society.

During this long period of delay and potential litigation, ugly passions would again be aroused. And our people would again be polarized in their opinions. And the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and abroad.

In the end, the courts might well hold that Richard Nixon had been denied due process, and the verdict of history would even more be inconclusive with respect to those charges arising out of the period of his Presidency, of which I am presently aware.

But it is not the ultimate fate of Richard Nixon that most concerns me, though surely it deeply troubles every decent and every compassionate person. My concern is the immediate future of this great country.

In this, I dare not depend upon my personal sympathy as a long-time friend of the former President, nor my professional judgment as a lawyer, and I do not.

As President, my primary concern must always be the greatest good of all the people of the United States whose servant I am. As a man, my first consideration is to be true to my own convictions and my own conscience.

My conscience tells me clearly and certainly that I cannot prolong the bad dreams that continue to reopen a chapter that is closed. My conscience tells me that only I, as President, have the constitutional power to firmly shut and seal this book. My conscience tells me it is my duty, not merely to proclaim domestic tranquillity but to use every means that I have to insure it.

I do believe that the buck stops here, that I cannot rely upon public opinion polls to tell me what is right.

I do believe that right makes might and that if I am wrong, 10 angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

I do believe, with all my heart and mind and spirit, that I, not as President but as a humble servant of God, will receive justice without mercy if I fail to show mercy.

Finally, I feel that Richard Nixon and his loved ones have suffered enough and will continue to suffer, no matter what I do, no matter what we, as a great and good nation, can do together to make his goal of peace come true.

[At this point, the President began reading from the proclamation granting the pardon.]

"Now, therefore, I, Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States, pursuant to the pardon power conferred upon me by Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution, have granted and by these presents do grant a full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in during the period from July (January) 20, 1969 through August 9, 1974."

[The President signed the proclamation and then resumed reading.]

"In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and seventy-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and ninety-ninth."

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, where he signed Proclamation 4311 granting the pardon.

SOURCE: Gerald R. Ford Library

*President Gerald Ford's News Conference of September 16, 1974*

The President: Ladies and gentlemen, this press conference is being held at a time when many Americans are observing the Jewish religious New Year. It begins a period of self-examination and reconciliation. In opening this press conference, I am mindful that the spirit of this holiday has a meaning for all Americans.

In examining one's deeds of the last year and in assuming responsibility for past actions and personal decisions, one can reach a point of growth and change. The purpose of looking back is to go forward with a new and enlightened dedication to our highest values.

The record of the past year does not have to be endlessly relived, but can be transformed by commitment to new insights and new actions in the year to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am ready to answer your questions.

Mr. Cormier. {Frank Cormier, Associated Press}

*Questions*

[1] Q. Mr. President, some Congressional Republicans who have talked to you have hinted that you may have had a secret reason for granting President Nixon a pardon sooner than you indicated you would at the last news conference, and I wonder if you could tell us what that reason was?

The President: At the outset, let me say I had no secret reason, and I don't recall telling any Republican that I had such a reason.

Let me review, quickly, if I might, the things that transpired following the last news conference.

As many of you know, I answered two, maybe three, questions concerning a pardon at that time. On return to the office, I felt that I had to have my counsel undertake a thorough examination as to what my right of pardon was under the Constitution. I also felt that it was very important that I find out what legal actions, if any, were contemplated by the Special Prosecutor.

That information was found out, and it was indicated to me that the possibility existed, the very real possibility, that the {former} President would be charged with obstructing justice and 10 other possible criminal actions.

In addition, I asked my general counsel to find out, if he could, how long such criminal proceedings would take, from the indictment, the carrying on of the trial, et cetera. And I was informed that this would take a year, maybe somewhat longer, for the whole process to go through.

I also asked my counsel to find out whether or not, under decisions of the judicial system, a fair trial could be given to the former President.

After I got that information, which took 2 or 3 days, I then began to evaluate, in my own mind, whether or not I should take the action which I subsequently did.

Miss Thomas. {Helen Thomas, United Press International}

Q. Throughout your Vice Presidency, you said that you didn't believe that former President Nixon had ever committed an impeachable offense. Is that still your belief, or do you believe that his acceptance of a pardon implies his guilt or is an admission of guilt?

The President: The fact that 38 members of the House Committee on the Judiciary, Democrat and Republican, have unanimously agreed in the report that was filed that the former President was guilty of an impeachable offense, I think, is very persuasive evidence.

And the second question, I don't---

Q. Was it an admission of guilt?

The President: Was the acceptance of the pardon by the President an admission of guilt? The acceptance of a pardon, I think, can be construed by many, if not all, as an admission of guilt.

Yes, Mr. Nessen. {Ron Nessen, NBC News}

Q. What reports have you received on Mr. Nixon's health, and what effect, if any, did this have on your decision to pardon him now?

The President: I have asked Dr. Lukash, who is the head physician in the White House, to keep me posted in proper channels as to the former President's health. I have been informed on a routine day-to-day basis, but I don't think I am at liberty to give any information as to those reports that I have received.

You also asked what impact did the President's health have on my decision. I think it is well known that just before I gave my statement, at the time that I gave the pardon, I personally wrote in a phrase "the threat to the President's health."

The main concern that I had at the time I made the decision was to heal the wounds throughout the United States. For a period of 18 months or longer, we had had turmoil and divisiveness in the American society. At the same time, the United States had major problems, both at home and abroad, that needed the maximum personal attention of the President and many others in the Government.

It seemed to me that as long as this divisiveness continued, this turmoil existed, caused by the charges and countercharges, the responsible people in the Government could not give their total attention to the problems that we had to solve at home and abroad.

And the net result was I was more anxious to heal the Nation—that was the top priority. And I felt then, and I feel now, that the action I took will do that. I couldn't be oblivious, however, to news accounts that I had concerning the President's health, but the major reason for the action I took related to the effort to reconcile divisions in our country and to heal the wounds that had festered for so long.

Q. Mr. President, after you had told us that you were going to allow the legal process to go on before you decided whether to pardon him, why did you decide on Sunday morning, abruptly, to pardon President Nixon?

The President: I didn't decide abruptly. I explained a moment ago the process that I went through subsequent to the last press conference. And when I had assembled all of that information that came to me through my counsel, I then most carefully analyzed the situation in the country, and I decided that we could not afford in America an extended period of continued turmoil. And the fact that the trial and all of the parts thereof would have lasted a year, perhaps more, with the continuation of the divisions in America, I felt that I should take the action that I did promptly and effectively.

[2] Q. Mr. President, I would like to ask you a question about the decision relating to custody of the Nixon tapes and documents. Considering the enormous interest that the Special Prosecutor's office had in those documents for further investigation, I am wondering why the negotiations with Mr. Nixon's representatives were conducted strictly between the counsel in your office without bringing in discussions with either Mr. Jaworski's representatives or those from the Justice Department?

The President: In the first place, I did receive a memorandum, or legal opinion, from the Department of Justice which indicated that in the opinion of the Department of Justice, the documents, tapes—the ownership of them—were in the hands of the former President. And historically, that has been the case for all Presidents.

Now, the negotiations for the handling of the tapes and documents were undertaken and consummated by my staff and the staff of the former President. I believe that they have been properly preserved, and they will be available under subpoena for any criminal proceeding. Now, the Special Prosecutor's staff has indicated some concern. I am saying tonight that my staff is working with the Special Prosecutor's staff to try and alleviate any concerns that they have. I hope a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out.

### *Previous Statements on Pardon*

{3.} Q. Mr. President, during your confirmation hearings as Vice President, you said that you did not think that the country would stand for a President to pardon his predecessor. Has your mind changed about such public opinion?

The President: In those hearings before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, I was asked a hypothetical question. And in answer to that hypothetical question, I responded by saying that I did not think the American people would stand for such an action.

Now that I am in the White House and don't have to answer hypothetical questions but have to deal with reality, it was my judgment, after analyzing all of the facts, that it was in the best interest of the United States for me to take the action that I did.

I think if you will reread what I said in answer to that hypothetical question, I did not say I wouldn't. I simply said that under the way the question was phrased, the American people would object.

But I am absolutely convinced, when dealing with reality in this very, very difficult situation, that I made the right decision in an effort—an honest, conscientious effort—to end the divisions and turmoil in the United States.

Mr. Lisagor. {Peter Lisagor, Chicago Daily News}

### *Safeguarding of Tapes and Documents*

{4} Q. Mr. President, is there any safeguard in the tapes agreement that was made with Mr. Nixon, first, with their destruction in the event anything happens to him, because under the agreement they will be destroyed, and secondly, should not the tapes be kept in the White House until the Special Prosecutor has finished dealing with them?

The President: The tapes and the documents are still in our possession, and we are, as I said a moment ago, working with the special Prosecutor's office to alleviate any concerns they have as to their disposition and their availability.

The agreement as to destruction is quite clear-cut. As long as Mr. Nixon is alive and during the period of time that is set forth, they are available for subpoena by a court involving any criminal proceedings. I think this is a necessary requirement for the protection of evidence for any such action.

### *The CIA and Chile*

{5} Q. Mr. President, recent Congressional testimony has indicated that the CIA, under the direction of a committee headed by Dr. Kissinger, attempted to destabilize the Government of Chile under former President Allende.

Is it the policy of your Administration to attempt to destabilize the governments of other democracies?

The President: Let me answer in general. I think this is a very important question.

Our Government, like other governments, does take certain actions in the intelligence field to help implement foreign policy and protect national security. I am informed reliably that Communist nations spend vastly more money than we do for the same kind of purposes.

Now, in this particular case, as I understand it—and there is no doubt in my mind—our Government had no involvement whatsoever in the Allende coup. To my knowledge, nobody has charged that. The facts are we had no involvement in any way in the coup itself.

In a period of time, 3 or 4 years ago, there was an effort being made by the Allende government to destroy opposition news media, both the writing press as well as the electronic press, and to destroy opposition political parties.

The effort that was made in this case was to help and assist the preservation of opposition newspapers and electronic media and to preserve opposition political parties.

I think this is in the best interest of the people in Chile, and, certainly, in our best interest.

Now, may I add one further comment?

The 40 Committee was established in 1948. It has been in existence under Presidents since that time. That Committee reviews every covert operation undertaken by our Government, and that information is relayed to the responsible Congressional committees where it is reviewed by House and Senate committees.

It seems to me that the 40 Committee should continue in existence, and I am going to meet with the responsible Congressional committees to see whether or not they want any changes in the review process so that the Congress, as well as the President, are fully informed and are fully included in the operations for any such action.

Mr. Sperling. {Godfrey Sperling, Jr., Christian Science Monitor}

*Further Questions on Pardon Decision*

{6} Q. In view of public reaction, do you think that the Nixon pardon really served to bind up the Nation's wounds? I wonder if you would assess public reaction to that move?

The President: I must say that the decision has created more antagonism than I anticipated. But as I look over the long haul with a trial, or several trials, a former President, criminal trials, the possibility of a former President being in the dock, so to speak, and the divisions that would have existed not just for a limited period of time but for a long period of time, it seems to me that when I had the choice between that possibility and the possibility of taking direct action hoping to conclude it, I am still convinced, despite the public reaction so far, that the decision I made was the right one.

Q. Mr. President, in regard to the pardon, you talk about the realities of the situation. Now those realities, rightly or wrongly, include a good many people who speculate about whether or not there is some sort of arrangement—they even, some of them call it a deal—between you and the former President, or between your staff and his staff—resignation in exchange for a full pardon.

The question is: Is there or was there, to your knowledge, any kind of understanding about this.

The President: There was no understanding, no deal between me and the former President, nor between my staff and the staff of the former President, none whatsoever.

### *Access to Income Tax Returns*

{7.} Q. Mr. President, sir, there is a bill that the Treasury Department has put forward, I think it is about 38 pages. Under this bill, which deals with getting hold of the returns, Internal Revenue returns, of citizens of the country, you could take action to get those returns whenever you wanted to.

I wonder if you are aware of this and if you feel that you need to get those returns of citizens?

The President: It is my understanding that a President has, by tradition and practice, and by law, the right to have access to income tax returns. I personally think that is something that should be kept very closely held. A person's income tax return is a very precious thing to that individual, and therefore, I am about to issue an Executive order {11805} that makes it even more restrictive as to how those returns can be handled. And I do think that a proposed piece of legislation that is coming to me and subsequently will be submitted, as I recollect, to the Congress would also greatly tighten up the availability or accessibility of income tax returns. I think they should be closely held, and I can assure you that they will be most judiciously handled as far as I am concerned.

### *Ownership of Presidential Papers*

{8.} Q. Mr. President, looking beyond the Nixon papers and in view of some criticism in Congress, do you believe we may have now reached the point where Presidential White House papers should remain in the Government's hands as the property of the Government?

The President: As far as I am personally concerned, I can see a legitimate reason for Presidential papers remaining the property of the Government. In my own case, I made a decision some years ago to turn over all of my Congressional papers, all of my Vice Presidential papers, to the University of Michigan archives.

As far as I am concerned, whether they go to the archives for use or whether they stay in the possession of the Government, I don't think it makes too much difference. I have no desire, personally, to retain whatever papers come out of my Administration.

Mr. Mollenhoff. {Clark R. Mollenhoff, Des Moines Register and Tribune}

#### *The Pardon Decision*

{9.} Q. Mr. President, at the last press conference you said, "The code of ethics that will be followed will be the example that I set." Do you find any conflicts of interest in the decision to grant a sweeping pardon to your life-long friend and your financial benefactor with no consultation for advice and judgment for the legal fallout?

The President: The decision to grant a pardon to Mr. Nixon was made primarily, as I have expressed, for the purpose of trying to heal the wounds throughout the country between Americans on one side of the issue or the other. Mr. Nixon nominated me for the office of Vice President. I was confirmed overwhelmingly in the House as well as in the Senate. Every action I have taken, Mr. Mollenhoff, is predicated on my conscience without any concern or consideration as to favor as far as I am concerned.

#### *Conditional Amnesty and the Pardon Decision*

{10.} Q. If your intention was to heal the wounds of the Nation, sir, why did you grant only a conditional amnesty to the Vietnam war draft evaders while granting a full pardon to President Nixon?

The President: The only connection between those two cases is the effort that I made in the one to heal the wounds involving the charges against Mr. Nixon and my honest and conscientious effort to heal the wounds for those who had deserted military service or dodged the draft. That is the only connection between the two.

In one case, you have a President who was forced to resign because of circumstances involving his Administration, and he has been shamed and disgraced by that resignation.

In the case of the draft dodgers and Army and military deserters, we trying to heal the wounds by that action that I took with the signing of the proclamation this morning.

### *Reports on Watergate Investigation*

{11.} Q. Mr. President, another concern that has been voiced around the country since the pardon is that the judicial process as it finally unwinds may not write the definitive chapter on Watergate and perhaps with particular regard to Mr. Nixon's particular involvement, however total, however it may have been the truth. My question is, would you consider appointing a special commission with extraordinary powers to look into all of the evidentiary material and to write that chapter and not leave it to later history?

The President: Well, it seems to me as I look at what has been done, I think you find a mass of evidence that has been accumulated. In the first instance, you have the very intensive investigation conducted by the House Committee on the Judiciary. It was a very well-conducted investigation. It came up with volumes of information.

In addition, the Special Prosecutor's office under Mr. Jaworski has conducted an intensive investigation and the Special Prosecutor's office will issue a report at the conclusion of their responsibility that I think will probably make additional information available to the American people

And thirdly, as the various criminal trials proceed in the months ahead, there obviously will be additional information made available to the American people. So, when you see what has been done and what undoubtedly will be one, I think the full story will be made available to the American people

### *Successors to General Haig and Press Secretary ter Horst*

{12.} Q. Mr. President, could you give us an idea who will succeed General Haig, \* and how are you coming on your search for a Press Secretary? \*\*

{\*General Alexander M. Haig, Jr. was the President's nominee to be Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. He had been White House chief of staff.}

{\* \*Mr. ter Horst resigned as Press Secretary in protest of the Presidential pardon.}

The President: Do I have a lot of candidates here? {Laughter} No shows? {Laughter}

I have several people in mind to replace General Haig, but I have made no decision on that. It was just announced today that the NATO countries have accepted him as the officer handling those responsibilities.

I think he is to take office succeeding General Goodpaster on December 15. He assumes his responsibilities as the head of U.S. military forces November 1. In the next few days undoubtedly I will make the decision as to the individual to succeed him.

As far as the Press Secretary is concerned, we are actively working on that, and we hope to have an announcement in a relatively short period of time.

### *The Former President's Health*

{13.} Q. Mr. President, prior to your deciding to pardon Mr. Nixon, did you have, apart from those reports, any information either from associates of the President or from his family or from any other source about his health, about his medical condition?

The President: Prior to the decision that I made granting a pardon to Mr. Nixon, I had no other specific information concerning his health other than what I had read in the news media or heard in the news media. I had not gotten any information from any of the Nixon family.

The sole source was what I had read in the news media plus one other fact. On Saturday, before the Sunday, a member of my staff was working with me on the several decisions I had to make. He was, from my staff, the one who had been in negotiations on Friday with the President and his staff. At the conclusion of some decisions that were made, I asked him, how did the President look, and he reported to me his observations.

But other than what I had read or heard about this particular incident, I had no precise information concerning the President's health.

Yes, Mr. Joyce. {Thomas H. Joyce, Newsweek Magazine}

### *Possibility of a Depression*

{14.} Q. Mr. president, your own economic advisers are suggesting—say the economy is very bad and they're very pessimistic—we are hearing the word "depression" used now. I wonder how you feel about whether we are heading for a depression?

The President: Let me say very strongly the United States is not going to have a depression. The overall economy of the United States is strong. Employment is still high. We do have the problem of inflation. We do have related problems, and we are going to come up with some answers that I hope will solve those problems.

We are not going to have a depression. We are going to work to make sure that our economy improves in the months ahead.

### *Food Aid Policy*

{15.} Q. Mr. President, in the face of massive food shortages and the prospects of significant starvation, will the United States be able to significantly increase its food aid to foreign countries, and what is our position going to be at the Rome conference on participation in the world grain reserves?

The President: Within the next few days a very major decision in this area will be made. I am not at liberty to tell you what the answer will be because it has not been decided.

But it is my hope that the United States for humanitarian purposes will be able to increase its contribution to those nations that have suffered because of drought or any of the other problems related to human needs.

### *Intelligence Activities and International Law*

{16.} Q. Back to the CIA. Under what international law do we have a right to attempt to destabilize the constitutionally elected government of another country, and does the Soviet Union have a similar right to try to destabilize the Government of Canada, for example, or the United States?

The President: I am not going to pass judgment on whether it is permitted or authorized under international law. It is a recognized fact that historically, as well as presently, such actions are taken in the best interest of the countries involved.

### *Administration Openness and Candor*

{17.} Q. Mr. President, last month when you assumed the presidency, you pledged openness and candor. Last week you decided on the ex-President's pardon in virtually total secrecy. Despite all you have said tonight, there would still seem to be some confusion, some contradiction.

My question is this: Are your watchwords of your Administration still openness and candor?

The President: Without any question, without any reservation. And I think in the one instance that you cite, it was a sole decision, and, believe me, it wasn't easy. And since I was the only one who could make that decision, I thought I had to search my own soul after consulting with a limited number of people. And I did it. And I think in the long run it was the right decision.

Mr. Cormier: Thank you, Mr. President.

Note: This was President Ford's second news conference. It began at 8:00 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. It was broadcast live on radio and television.

SOURCE: Gerald R. Ford Library