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Nixon Resigns

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer
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Richard Milhous Nixon announced last night that he will resign as the 37th President of the United States at noon today.

Vice President Gerald R. Ford of Michigan will take the oath as the new President at noon to complete the remaining 2 1/2 years of Mr. Nixon's term.

After two years of bitter public debate over the Watergate scandals, President Nixon bowed to pressures from the public and leaders of his party to become the first President in American history to resign.

"By taking this action," he said in a subdued yet dramatic television address from the Oval Office, "I hope that I will have hastened the start of the process of healing which is so desperately needed in America."

Vice President Ford, who spoke a short time later in front of his Alexandria home, announced that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger will remain in his Cabinet.

The President-to-be praised Mr. Nixon's sacrifice for the country and called it "one of the vary saddest incidents that I've every witnessed."

Mr. Nixon said he decided he must resign when he concluded that he no longer had "a strong enough political base in the Congress" to make it possible for him to complete his term of office.

Declaring that he has never been a quitter, Mr. Nixon said that to leave office before the end of his term "is abhorrent to every instinct in my body."

But "as President, I must put the interests of America first," he said.



Richard Nixon announces his resignation in 1974.

AP File Photo

While the President acknowledged that some of his judgments "were wrong," he made no confession of the "high crimes and misdemeanors" with which the House Judiciary Committee charged him in its bill of impeachment.

Specifically, he did not refer to Judiciary Committee charges that in the cover-up of Watergate crimes he misused government agencies such as the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Internal Revenue Service.

After the President's address, Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski issued a statement declaring that "there has been no agreement or understanding of any sort between the President or his representatives and the special prosecutor relating in any way to the President's resignation."

Jaworski said that his office "was not asked for any such agreement or understanding and offered none."

His office was informed yesterday afternoon of the President's decision, Jaworski said, but "my office did not participate in any way in the President's decision to resign."

Mr. Nixon's brief speech was delivered in firm tones and he appeared to be complete control of his emotions. The absence of rancor contrasted sharply with the "farewell" he delivered in 1962 after being defeated for the governorship of California.

An hour before the speech, however, the President broke down during a meeting with old congressional friends and had to leave the room.

He had invited 20 senators and 26 representatives for a farewell meeting in the Cabinet room. Later, Sen. Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.), one of those present, said Mr. Nixon said to them very much what he said in his speech.

"He just told us that the country couldn't operate with a half-time President," Goldwater reported. "Then he broke down and cried and he had to leave the room. Then the rest of us broke down and cried."

In his televised resignation, after thanking his friends for their support, the President concluded by saying he was leaving office "with this prayer: may God's grace be with you in all the days ahead."

As for his sharpest critics, the President said, "I leave with no bitterness toward those who have opposed me." He called on all Americans to "join together . . . in helping our new President succeed."

The President said he had thought it was his duty to persevere in office in face of the Watergate charges and to complete his term.

"In the past days, however, it has become evident to me that I no longer

have a strong enough political base in the Congress to justify continuing that effort," Mr. Nixon said.

His family "unanimously urged" him to stay in office and fight the charges against him, he said. But he came to realize that he would not have the support needed to carry out the duties of his office in difficult times.

"America needs a full-time President and a full-time Congress," Mr. Nixon said. The resignation came with "a great sadness that I will not be here in this office" to complete work on the programs started, he said.

But praising Vice President Ford, Mr. Nixon said that "the leadership of America will be in good hands."

In his admission of error, the outgoing President said: "I deeply regret any injuries that may have been done in the course of the events that led to this decision."

He emphasized that world peace had been the overriding concern of his years in the White House.

When he first took the oath, he said, he made a "sacred commitment" to "consecrate my office and wisdom to the cause of peace among nations."

"I have done my very best in all the days since to be true to that pledge," he said, adding that he is now confident that the world is a safer place for all peoples.

"This more than anything is what I hoped to achieve when I sought the presidency," Mr. Nixon said. "This more than anything is what I hope will be my legacy to you, to our country, as I leave the presidency."

Noting that he had lived through a turbulent period, he recalled a statement of Theodore Roosevelt about the man "in the arena whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood" and who, if he fails "at least fails while daring greatly."

Mr. Nixon placed great emphasis on his successes in foreign affairs. He said his administration had "unlocked the doors that for a quarter of a century stood between the United States and the People's Republic of China."

In the mideast, he said, the United States must begin to build on the peace in that area. And with the Soviet Union, he said, the administration had begun the process of ending the nuclear arms race. The goal now, he said, is to reduce and finally destroy those arms "so that the threat of nuclear war will no longer hang over the world." The two countries, he added, "must live together in cooperation rather than in confrontation."

Mr. Nixon has served 2,026 days as the 37th President of the United States. He leaves office with 2 1/2 years of his second term remaining to be carried out by the man he nominated to be Vice President last year.

Yesterday morning, the President conferred with his successor. He spent much of the day in his Executive Office Building hideaway working on his speech and attending to last-minute business.

At 7:30 p.m., Mr. Nixon again left the White House for the short walk to the Executive Office Building. The crowd outside the gates waved U.S. flags and sang "America" as he walked slowly up the steps, his head bowed, alone.

At the EOB, Mr. Nixon met for a little over 20 minutes with the leaders of Congress -- James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), president pro tem to the Senate; Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), Senate majority leader; Hugh Scott (R-Pa.), Senate minority leader; Carl Albert (D-Okla.), speaker of the House; and John Rhodes (R-Ariz.), House minority leader.

It was exactly six years ago yesterday that the 55-year-old Californian accepted the Republican nomination for President for the second time and went on to a narrow victory in November over Democrat Hubert H. Humphrey.

"I was ready. I was willing. And events were such that this seemed to be the time the party was willing for me to carry the standard," Nixon said after winning first-ballot nomination in the convention at Miami Beach.

In his acceptance speech on Aug. 8, 1968, the nominee appealed for victory to "make the American dream come true for millions of Americans."

"To the leaders of the Communist world we say, after an era of confrontation, the time has come for an era of negotiation," Nixon said.

The theme was repeated in his first inaugural address on Jan. 20, 1969, and became the basis for the foreign policy of his first administration.

Largely because of his breakthroughs in negotiations with China and the Soviet Union, and partly because of divisions in the Democratic Party, Mr. Nixon won a mammoth election victory in 1972, only to be brought down by scandals that grew out of an excessive zeal to make certain he would win re-election.

Mr. Nixon and his family are expected to fly to their home in San Clemente, Calif. early today. Press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler and Rose Mary Woods, Mr. Nixon's devoted personal secretary for more than two decades, will accompany the Nixons.

Alexander M. Haig Jr., the former Army vice chief of staff who was

brought into the White House as staff chief following the resignation of H.R. (Bob) Haldeman on April 30, 1973, has been asked by Mr. Ford to remain in his present position.

It is expected that Haig will continue in the position as staff chief to assure an orderly transfer of responsibilities but not stay indefinitely.

The first firm indication yesterday that the President had reached a decision came when deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren announced at 10:55 a.m. that the President was about to begin a meeting in the Oval Office with the Vice President.

"The President asked the Vice President to come over this morning for a private meeting -- and that is all the information I have at this moment," Warren said.

He promised to post "some routine information, bill actions and appointments" and to return with additional information" in an hour or so."

Warren's manner and the news he had to impart made it clear at last that resignation was a certainty. Reports already were circulating on Capitol Hill that the President would hold a reception for friends and staff members late in the day and a meeting with congressional leaders.

Shortly after noon, Warren announced over the loudspeaker in the press room that the meeting between the President and the Vice President had lasted for an hour and 10 minutes.

At 2:20 p.m., press secretary Ziegler walked into the press room and, struggling to control his emotions, read the following statement:

"I am aware of the intense interest of the American people and of you in this room concerning developments today and over the last few days. This has, of course, been a difficult time.

"The President of the United States will meet various members of the bipartisan leadership of Congress here at the White House early this evening.

"Tonight, at 9 o'clock, Eastern Daylight Time, the President of the United States will address the nation on radio and television from his Oval Office."

The room was packed with reporters, and Ziegler read the statement with difficulty. Although his voice shook, it did not break. As soon as he had finished, he turned on his heel and left the room, without so much as a glance at the men and women in the room who wanted to question him.

There were tears in the eyes of some of the secretaries in the press office. Others, who have been through many crises in recent years and have become used to overwork, plowed ahead with their duties, with

telephones ringing incessantly.

In other offices, loyal Nixon workers reacted with sadness but also with resignation and defeat. They were not surprised, and some showed a sense of relief that at last the battle was over.

Some commented bitterly about former aides H.R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman. The President's loyal personal aide and valet Manola Sanchez, a Spanish-born immigrant from Cuba whose independence and wit are widely admired, did not hide his feelings.

Speaking bluntly to some of his old friends, he castigated aides he said had betrayed the President. One long-time official, who heard about the Sanchez remarks, commented: "They [Haldeman and Ehrlichman] tried three times to fire him because they couldn't control him. Imagine, trying to fire someone like Manola."

But why did the President always rely on Ehrlichman and Haldeman? The official was asked. "Will we ever know?" he replied. "When Mr. Nixon was Vice President," he recalled, "he demanded that we never abuse the franking privilege. If there was any doubt, we were to use stamps. Everything had to be above board.

"Surely his friendship with Ehrlichman and Haldeman was one of the most expensive in history."

But the President himself, said another long-time aide, must have been two persons, the one who was motivated by high ideals and another who connived and schemed with his favorite gut-fighters.

One man who worked through most of the first Nixon term said he saw the President angry only once. Often he would say, "That will be tough politically, but we must do the right thing."

When that official left his post after nearly four years of intimate association with the President, he told his wife: "I've never gotten to know what sort of man he is."

One official, who has known Mr. Nixon well for many years and remains a White House aide, commented: "He is obviously a bad judge of character. But a lot was accomplished. So much more could have been accomplished but for these fun and games. It was such a stupid thing to happen."

The march of events that brought about the President's downfall turned its last corner Monday when Mr. Nixon released the partial transcripts of three taped conversations he held on June 23, 1972 with Haldeman.

It seemed inevitable then that this would be his last week in office, yet he continued to fight back and to insist that he would not resign. On Tuesday, the President held a Cabinet meeting and told his official family that he would not resign.

On Wednesday, however, the end appeared near, for his support on Capitol Hill was disappearing at dizzying speed. There were demands from some of his staunchest supporters that he should resign at once.

Late Wednesday, the President met with Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.), House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) and Sen. Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.).

They said afterward that the President had made no decision, but it was obvious later that for all intents and purposes the decision had been made despite what the leaders said. They obviously could not make the announcement for him, but it must have been apparent to them that the end was at hand.

Later Wednesday, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger twice conferred with Mr. Nixon, first in the early evening for half an hour and then from 9:30 p.m. until midnight.

It was not known whether the two men were alone or accompanied by Haig and others.

Yesterday, Kissinger met with principal deputies in the State Department to tell them what to expect and to assign tasks to different people. Messages will be sent to heads of state to notify them formally of the change.

A White House spokesman said more than 10,000 telephone calls were received in the past two days expressing "disbelief and the hope that the President would not resign."

Thursday was a wet, humid August day, but despite intermittent rain the crowds packed the sidewalks in front of the White House. It was an orderly crowd, resigned and curious, watching newsmen come and go and being a part of a dramatic moment in the life of the nation.

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