

Presidency of Gerald R. Ford



Gerald R. Ford was the first President to occupy the White House by virtue of appointment. He served the remainder of Nixon's term, from August 1974 to January 1977. When Richard Nixon resigned, Ford nominated New York Governor **Nelson A. Rockefeller** as his Vice-President. The laws of the **Twenty-Fifth Amendment** were followed and Congress quickly approved his appointment.

Background of Gerald R. Ford

- Born in Nebraska then later moved to Michigan
- Received a football scholarship to the University of Michigan and was a major player in two national championships.
- Graduated as a law student from Yale University
- Served in the U.S. Navy on an aircraft carrier during World War II
- Elected to the House of Representatives in 1948
- Served on the Warren Commission that investigated the death of President John F. Kennedy

When Ford assumed the presidency and immediately took up the task of reassuring a shaken and demoralized American public. ***"Our long national nightmare is over,"*** he declared in his inaugural address. ***"Our Constitution works. Our great republic is a government of laws and not men."***

Shortly after taking office, **Ford pardoned Nixon** for any crimes he may have committed as president. The presidential pardon meant that Nixon would never have to face criminal charges over his involvement in the Watergate scandal. Ford's decision generated a swirl of controversy. Millions of Americans wanted to see the disgraced former president brought to justice. Some critics charged that Ford issued the pardon as part of a pre-arranged deal to reach the Oval Office. But Ford insisted that the nation's future hinged on ending the ordeal of Watergate and beginning the process of healing.

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One of the most difficult parts of Ford's Presidency was that the Democratic Party tightly controlled Congress and this made for a tough working relationship within the two branches of the government, with little or no bi-partisanship in both domestic and foreign issues.

The Nixon Pardon

Richard Nixon still faced a possible criminal indictment and trial for his actions. Nixon never really apologized for his actions and many Americans wanted justice. President Ford used his Constitutional power to grant a general pardon to Nixon. He claimed that he wanted to "close the book" on Watergate. However, Ford's actions would later hurt him as it would cost him many votes in the 1976 election.

Draft Amnesty



After the final fall of Saigon and the South Vietnamese government in 1975, many Americans wanted to put the war behind them. There remained thousands of “**draft evaders**” who had left the United States, mostly to Canada, to avoid military service.

President Ford established a **draft amnesty program** which required those who wanted to return to America to take an oath of allegiance to the country and then perform community service. Critics said that Ford was asking too much, especially after his generous pardon to Richard Nixon. Many evaders took up Ford’s proposal but it was not until the late 1970’s that President Jimmy Carter issued an unconditional pardon to those who still remained in exile out of the country.

The Oil Crisis

Gerald Ford’s domestic problems were that the national economy was weak and there were high rates of inflation and unemployment.

Since the end of World War II, the United States was the world’s largest importer of oil. Endless supplies of cheap crude oil flowed from the Middle East. However, in 1973, the **OPEC cartel (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)** embargoed oil shipment to countries that supported Israel. The United States had supported the State of Israel since 1948. In addition, the OPEC cartel raised the price of crude oil from \$2.50 to \$35.00 per barrel. Oil was now in short supply in America and millions of people spent hours in long lines just to purchase a few gallons of gasoline.



President Ford (and later President Carter) tried to implement federal, state and local authorities by **rationing gasoline, imposing a highway speed limit of 55 miles-an-hour and requested temporary school closings**. Many of these measures were never approved by the Democratic Congress. Ford had always struggled with the Democratic Congress; he even vetoed 66 pieces of legislation that conflicted with his basic policy of being a fiscally Conservative President.

Gerald Ford did manage to secure the completion of the **Alaskan North Slope Pipeline** and the development of more fuel-efficient cars to reduce foreign dependency on oil. To offset the use of oil, Ford also allowed coal and nuclear power stations to produce power, but these methods would later lead to environmental problems.

Foreign Policy

President Ford's leadership led to both successes and failures in his foreign policy.

Negatively, he was unable to convince Congress to increase funding to South Vietnam which ultimately led to the region falling to the communist forces from North Vietnam in 1975.

On a positive note, Gerald Ford did reduce tensions with the Soviet Union when he signed the **Helsinki Accords** in late 1975. His efforts definitely created a more friendly environment between Western nations and the communist countries of Eastern Europe.

The Election of 1976

Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon was a major reason for losing the general election. The election was close but he ended up losing to the Democratic candidate, **Jimmy Carter**. He did not become too upset about the loss. He had planned to retire from politics at the end of the year. He saw his role as President of the United States as a bonus to his political career.

He remained very active in retirement. His wife suffered from severe alcoholism and he founded the **Betty Ford Clinic** to assist in helping other alcoholics. He served on several boards of large corporations as a political and economic advisor while keeping up with his hobbies of skiing and golf.

In 1999, Gerald Ford received the **Presidential Medal of Freedom** which is America's highest civilian honor. It is awarded to individuals who make an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors, and Gerald Ford was one of those people who served his country when it was most needed.

Gerald Ford died from cardiovascular disease in December, 2006.