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Statement By The Honorable Gerald R. Ford Minority Leader of The House of Representatives Before The House Committee on the Judiciary

Gerald R. Ford

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STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE GERALD R. FORD
MINORITY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
THURSDAY, NOV. 15, 1973

ADVANCE FOR RELEASE AT 10:00 A.M. E.S.T.

I am no stranger to a hearing room of the House of Representatives but this is the first time I have come before this or any other Committee of the House in the capacity of a nominee for confirmation. Indeed it is the first time in our history that anybody has. The 25th Amendment to the Constitution, which was framed in this Committee eight years ago, establishes the precedent that the House of Representatives as well as the Senate must advise and consent to the nomination by the President of a person to fill a vacancy in the office of Vice President of the United States.

I am glad to be the guinea pig for this experiment and hope that the surgeons are skillful and the patient survives.

In a more serious vein, I hope that the solemn Constitutional duty we are about to undertake will be an important part of the healing process that our government and our great country so desperately need and demand today.

The House has been my home for 25 years. I know all of you and you all have known me on a day-to-day basis for all or some of those years. Your distinguished Chairman and I stood together and simultaneously swore to the same oath of office as freshmen Members on January 3, 1949. For nearly 11 years your distinguished Ranking Minority Member and I have been working together on behalf of our neighboring districts in Michigan.

Being a lawyer I have a special respect for the competence and probity of the Committee on the Judiciary to which the rules and traditions of the House have assigned some of the most momentous Constitutional responsibilities of the Congress.

To these heavy duties, fate and the untried 25th Amendment have added another, to test the qualifications and character of a potential Vice President of the United States. Of course, every Vice President is by definition a potential President of the United States.

This is an awesome obligation, both for you and for me, one which in the past has been left to the wisdom or unwisdom of party standard bearers,

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political conventions and the more or less automatic acceptance of the electorate.

On one early occasion, when the electoral vote was tied, a Vice President was chosen by the Senate, but until today the House of Representatives has never had a voice in the selection of the President of the Other Body.

Speaking as a man of the House and a colleague, I want this Committee and the whole House to do a good job. Over the past four weeks, some of my loyal and impatient friends have said to me, "Why are they taking so long? We can understand the Senate where they don't know you so well. But the House should have confirmed you by unanimous consent the next morning."

Such sentiments make me feel good, of course. But I doubt whether I could have gotten unanimous consent. And even if a few Members could have been lured into the cloakrooms, it wouldn't have been good for the country.

It is the country we have to think about, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, not Jerry Ford or the House or the Congress or majority or minority or the segments of the country that each of us represent. I am sure each and every one of us is thinking of the country, and will carry out in our own ways the oath we have taken together.

So although we have been friends and I hope will be friends and colleagues, I want no special favor in presenting myself for your questions. I ask that you consider me as you would any other American in my position -- or perhaps I should say in my predicament -- and as you would the nominee of any duly elected President under the provisions of the 25th Amendment.

I suspect that from the investigative reports you have received that you know more about Jerry Ford than I know about myself -- the FBI wouldn't let me read their report but I understand it is the most exhaustive they have ever made, not to mention the investigations of the Internal Revenue Service, the General Accounting Office, and your own thorough staff.

I believe I have co-operated fully and complied faithfully with every request made of me for information and records bearing upon my fitness for the office of Vice President, and while this has been a time-consuming and monumental task, everyone concerned has conducted it with great courtesy and

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civility. I would like to see this spirit in public business become contagious, Mr. Chairman.

There are just four points I would like to make at the outset. Although I have said them publicly and before the Senate Committee I am still a Member of the House, and I cannot quite consider them official until they become a part of the record of this body, which I am not ashamed to say I love deeply.

First, I have made some mistakes and will probably make some more. I don't know anybody who hasn't. I hope my past mistakes have been honest ones and that my future mistakes will be few. I hope I never get to the point where I can't admit I'm wrong.

Second, I believe in looking forward rather than backward. Of course we learn from the past, but we live for the present and the future. I don't believe in replaying last Saturday's game but in training hard for next Saturday's. I tend to forget the bad plays and remember the scoring ones -- but the upcoming game is always the best of all.

Third, I think people ought to tell the truth. Especially politicians. In the quarter century I have served in the Congress the best politicians I have known have been those who never misled me or anybody else. They have been the most successful, because people trusted them, and kept on re-electing them. And in spite of all the cynicism you hear and read about our profession of politics, I believe there are as many honest men and women in it as in most occupations, and probably more.

Finally, I believe in friendly compromise. I said over in the Senate hearings that truth is the glue that holds government together. Compromise is the oil that makes government go.

The office in the Capitol which I have the honor to use, and which regrettably I may have to move out of soon, was for many years the Speaker's. During the period between the 79th and 84th Congresses the late Sam Rayburn and the late Joe Martin had to switch offices so many times that the last time they agreed to put a stop to it. So H-230 wound up the Minority Leader's Office.

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These two great leaders of their respective parties fought their legislative battles every day, but almost every evening after adjournment they sat down in that office, with its beautiful sunset view down the Mall to the Lincoln Memorial and poured a little of the potion which Mr. Sam prescribed to "strike a blow for liberty". I believe he inherited that expression from Speaker and later Vice President John Mance Garner.

The Democrat from Texas Mr. Sam, and the Republican from Massachusetts Mr. Martin were fast friends, and they shared their friendship with others on Capitol Hill and with the transient occupants of the White House of both parties who sought their help and counsel. I recall particularly President Eisenhower telling how much he relied on Mr. Sam when the interests of the country were really at stake. They could compete but they could also compromise.

Mr. Chairman, if I am confirmed as Vice President -- the first leader of the House since Speaker Garner to make that abrupt change from one side of the Capitol to the other -- my intention will be to use whatever reputation for truth and fairness I have acquired in the House, and whatever capacity for friendship and reasonable compromise I have achieved in the House, to make this government work better for the good of all Americans.

Not only as between the House and the Senate and between the Congress and the Executive Branch, but between individuals in both parties who I am proud to count as my friends. This is not a spectacular role for the next three years, but it is one I believe to be needed, and to which I can bring a certain amount of experience.

Mr. Chairman, I am continually being asked in recent weeks -- Do I support the President on this? Do I support the President on that? Do I support the President in general? I cannot imagine why people keep asking me this and I am confident the members of this Committee will not do so. My colleagues know the answer very well, if they have been listening to me even one-tenth of the time -- which is asking quite a lot.

Of course I support the President. He is my friend of a quarter century. His political philosophy is very close to my own. He is the head of my party and the Constitutional Chief Executive of the nation. He was chosen

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quite emphatically by the people a year ago as I -- if confirmed as Vice President -- will not have been.

Not only have I usually supported President Nixon in the House -- I also supported Presidents Truman and Eisenhower and Kennedy and Johnson, whenever the national interest was at stake. As a Member of Congress I have voiced my support of Presidents publicly when I thought they were right and my criticisms publicly when I thought they were wrong.

To be honest, I imagine that as Vice President you do your Presidential criticizing a little more privately than publicly. But those of you who know me know that I am my own man and that the only pledge by which I have bound myself in accepting the President's trust and confidence is that by which we are all bound before God and under the Constitution, to do our best for America.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am ready for your questions.

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