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PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

September 8, 1974

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I HAVE COME TO A DECISION WHICH I FELT I SHOULD TELL YOU, AND ALL MY FELLOW CITIZENS, AS SOON AS I WAS CERTAIN IN MY OWN MIND AND CONSCIENCE THAT IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

I HAVE LEARNED ALREADY IN THIS OFFICE THAT ONLY THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS 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, 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 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 CAN GO ON AND ON ~~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 AS HE TRIES TO RESEAPE



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 AM COMPELLED TO CONCLUDE THAT MANY MONTHS AND PERHAPS MORE YEARS WILL HAVE TO PASS BEFORE RICHARD NIXON COULD HOPE TO 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, 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 BE EVEN MORE 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 COMPASSIONATE PERSON -- BUT THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF THIS GREAT COUNTRY. IN THIS I DARE NOT DEPEND UPON MY



PERSONAL SYMPATHY AS A LONGTIME 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 WILL ALWAYS BE 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 SAYS IT IS MY DUTY, NOT
MERELY TO PROCLAIM DOMESTIC TRANQUILLITY, BUT TO USE
EVERY MEANS I HAVE TO ENSURE IT.



I DO BELIEVE THAT THE BUCK STOPS HERE AND 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 TEN 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.

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.

(SIGN DOCUMENT)

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I HAVE HEREUNTO SET MY HAND THIS
8TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN
HUNDRED SEVENTY-FOUR, AND OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA THE 199TH.

(END)



[9/8/74]

I am not a dramatic person, so you will believe me when I say that I have agonized over the problem of what I should do about the misdeeds of our former President Mr. Nixon. Our country has been and continues to be torn over what procedures should be taken and what punishments should be meted out -- even as we have been frightened and appalled by the political horror and the moral nightmare of Watergate. There is no need for anyone to point out to me the necessity of justice and the American ideal of equity. We are all aware of the great American tradition. It is the basis of our existence as a nation of law. We assume and insist that we are all equal under the law. The great Lady who holds the scale of justice is blind to persons. We would not want it to be any other way.

But, there is obviously much more to the problem than this, or there would not be so many of us so deeply troubled and distressed. Your letters prove to me that you too have been agonizing. It seems to me we are all troubled by the desire to do two different things. We want to prove that there is no distinction of persons under the law, but we want to be more than punitive.

I think the solution rests in the fact that this is a Nation under God.

Deep in our hearts we know that however necessary Justice may be, it must be tempered by mercy. Forgiveness is at the heart of every great world religion. Christians daily proclaim the ideal in prayer. The



ideal is religious. I believe in it. I believe it is good and valid. In the end it is the only way in which one can go on living together peacefully and creatively.

At the conclusion of the great American Strife, Abraham Lincoln said, "We must bind up the wounds". Certainly our condition now is not so desperate as then. But we do have wounds, and we are badly bruised. I want to help bind up those wounds. I want to make us whole again. I want to help wash out the bitterness and resentment. I want to help us rise above vindictiveness and transcend the need to punish.

I am deeply sorry that there is already so much damage done -- so many persons hurt, so many careers destroyed, and so many more who will suffer. I would like to be able to wash away all the pain and suffering. But if I cannot do that, I can at least proclaim in symbolic form our loving desire to forgive and to be re-united as a people.

Therefore (Proclamation to be inserted here) -----



Just as the Presidency is symbolic of the total American people and represents the highest and best of our traditions, so is pardoning the former President. I want to give expression to our desire as a people to move toward even greater justice through mercy. As a distinguished founding father, Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist's papers, discussing the application of a pardon in other contexts, "there are often critical moments when a well-timed offer of pardon may restore the tranquility of the commonwealth."

My heart, my mind, and my conscience have led me to grant a pardon of former President Nixon. I cannot avoid it. I hope I speak for the heart and conscience of America.

