

PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES



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**Gerald R. Ford**

Born: July 14, 1913, Omaha, Nebraska.  
 Occupation: Lawyer, public official.  
 Wife: Elizabeth Bloomer. Children: Three boys, one girl.  
 President: 1974-1977. Republican party.  
 Vice-President: Nelson Rockefeller.  
 Died: December 26, 2006. Buried: Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Gerald R. Ford was born in Omaha, Nebr., on July 14, 1913. He was christened Leslie King, Jr., but after his parents were divorced when he was two and his mother remarried, he took the name of his stepfather, Gerald R. Ford, who was a paint salesman. He grew up in Grand Rapids, Mich. After graduating from high school in 1931, "Jerry" Ford entered the University of Michigan, where he studied economics and political science. He played center on two national-championship football teams and was the team's most valuable player in 1934. He received his B. A. degree in 1935. He was then an assistant football coach and boxing coach at Yale University. He was admitted to the Michigan bar in 1941 and practiced law in Grand Rapids.

During World War II, Ford served four years in the Navy as an aviation operations officer, including two years aboard the aircraft carrier USS Monterey. He was discharged as a lieutenant commander. In 1948 Ford married Elizabeth Bloomer, a former professional dancer with Martha Graham who had also been a model and fashion coordinator. They had four children: Michael, John, Steven, and Susan.

Ford first received national attention when he was elected chairman of the House Republican Conference in 1963. His victory was considered the first step in rejuvenating the "Old Guard" image of the congressional Republicans. Two years later, Ford challenged the reelection of House Minority Leader Charles A. Halleck of Indiana. The House Republicans elected Ford by a vote of 73 to 67. He remained in the leadership position until he was appointed to the vice presidency by President Nixon in 1973.

In 1963, President Lyndon Johnson had named Ford to the Warren Commission to investigate the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In 1965, Ford, in collaboration with John R. Stiles, published a book, *Portrait of the Assassin*, describing some of his findings while on the commission. Congressman Ford supported greater appropriations for the Department of Defense. He criticized President Johnson for not pursuing the Vietnam War more vigorously, but he endorsed President Nixon's troop withdrawal and supported the 1973 peace treaty. Ford also supported appropriations for foreign aid and the United Nations. One of Ford's most controversial activities was his unsuccessful attempt in 1970 to instigate impeachment proceedings against Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, a liberal, on charges that included conflict of interest.

Two days after Spiro Agnew resigned on Oct. 10, 1973, President Nixon nominated Ford to succeed him under a provision of the 25th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. After a thorough investigation, Ford was approved by both houses of Congress and sworn in as vice president on December 6. The Republican Party was sagging under the weight of the Watergate scandal, and the vice president, in hundreds of public appearances, sought to rally the party faithful. He expressed

the belief that President Nixon was not involved in the Watergate cover-up. But the president, after being forced to release damaging evidence, resigned after it became apparent that he would be removed through the impeachment process. Chief Justice Warren Burger in the East Room of the White House swore in Ford as president at noon on Aug. 9, 1974.

The new president tried to restore public confidence in the national leadership and in the institutions of government. His administration was one of the most open in years, and Ford sought to emphasize candor in his relationships with the public and the press. But in both domestic and world affairs he inherited problems that did not lend themselves to quick solutions. Ford nominated, and Congress approved, former New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller to be vice president of the United States. By mid-1976, Ford had replaced all but three members of the Nixon cabinet. Only Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, and Secretary of the Treasury William Simon remained in their posts. In November 1975, Ford requested the resignation of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Colby. Ford appointed as replacements White House Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld to Defense and Ambassador George Bush to the CIA.

Ford's "honeymoon" with Congress and the public ended on Sept. 8, 1974, when he granted a "full, free and absolute pardon" to former President Nixon "for all offenses against the United States which he . . . has committed or may have committed or taken part in" while he was president. Nixon accepted the pardon. The response from newspapers, members of Congress, and the general public were overwhelmingly negative. The critics contended that the pardon was premature because it precluded possible indictment that might have led to answers to some of the remaining Watergate questions.

In his first year in office, Ford confronted severe economic problems, including both inflation and recession. At first he emphasized the fight against inflation by proposing solutions that reflected his long-standing personal belief in reduced spending, balanced budgets, and tight money.

In early 1975, Ford reluctantly changed his goals to concentrate on relieving recessionary pressures rather than inflationary ones. Unemployment was over 9%, new housing starts were at their lowest point in years, and new car sales were down sharply. Ford urged Congress to cut individual and corporate taxes by \$16 billion and to take steps to reduce the national dependence on foreign oil imports. By mid-1976 recessionary pressures had eased. Industrial production advanced steadily, making up almost two thirds of the 1973-1975 drop. Non-farm employment increased by 2.5 million persons, the workweek was lengthened, and the unemployment rate dropped from 8.9% in mid-1975 to 7.8% in late 1976. Unemployment, however, remained high by historical standards. Inflation continued to plague the consumer, but the rate of price increases dropped dramatically.

When he took office, Ford inherited a budding policy of détente with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China as well as a continuing crisis in the Middle East. The Vietnam War, so costly to the United States in blood and treasure, ended in 1975 after the South Vietnamese troop withdrawal from the

northern provinces turned into a disorganized retreat. Within a few weeks Saigon collapsed, and Ford ordered a dramatic evacuation of American citizens and Vietnamese sympathizers. More than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees entered the United States and were resettled throughout the country. The fall of Vietnam followed by only a few weeks the fall of Cambodia. Throughout the early spring of 1975, rebels advanced on Phnom Penh, the capital, and the city surrendered on April 16, after American personnel were evacuated. In early May the new Cambodian government seized an American ship, the cargo vessel *Mayaguez*, in what was widely interpreted as a challenge to American resolve. After diplomatic initiatives failed to gain release of the ship, Ford ordered a limited Marine and air action to retrieve the ship and crew. The president won widespread approval from Congress and the public, despite the fact that 41 lives were lost in the recovery of the 39-member crew.

The other major world trouble spot was the Middle East. Another war between Israel and its Arab neighbors was a constant threat, with the additional peril that petroleum supplies would be cut off to other nations. In September 1975, Egypt and Israel signed a Kissinger-negotiated pact separating the opposing armies and calling for U. S. civilian technicians to man truce-observation posts. The United States, along with the rest of the world, stood helplessly by while rival factions fought in Lebanon. Ultimately most Americans were ordered to leave Lebanon.



**Ford family on the White House grounds, Sept. 6, 1976.**  
 Left to right: Steve, Susan, Jack, Gayle, and Mike.

On Aug. 18, 1976, Gerald R. Ford was nominated as the Republican candidate for president. Ordinarily, that statement about an incumbent would not create much interest. But as an appointed president, Ford had been unable to generate the kind of enthusiasm and loyalty within his party that elected presidents traditionally expect.

Former California Gov. Ronald Reagan also sought the nomination, forcing Ford to campaign hard for his share of the delegates. Ford based his pre-convention campaign on his efforts to pull the country together after the Watergate scandals, the rebound of the economy after the recession, the maintenance of peace in the world, and his record of 27 years of public service in Washington.

Reagan attacked the Ford policy of détente and the administration's negotiations over a new Panama Canal treaty, but did not disagree with the essentials of Ford's position on the passive role of government in domestic affairs. Ultimately, the split was not between ideologies but between regions. Both candidates commanded support from conservatives, but Ford was able to call upon Republicans in the large delegations of the East and the Midwest and part of those in the South. Reagan's support was centered in the remainder of the South and the Far West, where he won most of the primaries and state conventions.

When the nomination came to a vote in Kansas City, Mo., Ford won 1,187 to 1,070. Ford began the fall campaign as an underdog against a united Democratic party led by ex-governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia. Several developments made Ford's task even more difficult. A campaign financing law limited both parties to the same expenditures, wiping out the usual Republican advantage. Investigations of Ford's finances and of his role in discouraging a 1972 investigation of Watergate created adverse headlines, even while producing no evidence of wrongdoing. The economic recovery slowed. Ford's performance in televised debates with Carter was uneven. Inappropriate remarks by two members of his administration offended blacks and Jews. Nonetheless, most Americans admired Ford's decency and honesty, and many voters thought him trustworthier than Carter. In November, Ford lost by 1.7 million votes and by a narrow margin in the Electoral College.

Ford died at the age of 93 years on December 26, 2006 at his home in Rancho Mirage, California of heart failure. Ford is honored during a memorial service in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. on December 30, 2006. President Ford's tomb at his Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



**President Ford's birthplace**



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