

Good evening:

This is the 37th time I have spoken to you from this office, where so many decisions have been made that shape the history of this nation. Each time I have done so to discuss with you some matter that I believe affected the national interest. In all the decisions I have made in my public life I have always tried to do what was best for the nation.

Throughout the long and difficult period of Watergate, I have felt it was my duty to persevere -- to make every possible effort to complete the term of office to which you elected me. In the past few 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. As long as there was such a base, I felt strongly that it was necessary to see the constitutional process through to its conclusion; that to do otherwise would be unfaithful to the spirit of that deliberately difficult process, and a dangerously destabilizing precedent for the future. But with the disappearance of that base, I now believe that the constitutional purpose has been served. And there is no longer a need for the process to be prolonged.

I would have preferred to carry through to the finish whatever the personal agony it would have involved, and my family unanimously urged me to do so. But the interests of the nation must always come before any personal considerations. From the discussions I have had with Congressional and other leaders I have concluded that because of the Watergate matter I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the way the interests of the nation will require.

I have never been a quitter.

To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President, I must put the interests of America first.

America needs a full-time President and a full-time Congress, particularly at this time with problems we face at home and abroad. To continue to fight through the months ahead for my personal vindication would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress in a period when our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home.

Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow.

Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour in this office.

As I recall the high hopes for America with which we began this second term, I feel a great sadness that I will not be here in this office working on your behalf to achieve those hopes in the next two and a half years. But in turning over direction of the Government to Vice President Ford I know, as I told the nation when I nominated him for that office ten months ago, that the leadership of America would be in good hands.

In passing this office to the Vice President, I also do so with the profound sense of the weight of responsibility that will fall on his shoulders tomorrow, and therefore of the understanding, the patience, the cooperation he will need from all Americans. As he assumes that responsibility he will deserve the help and the support of all of us. As we look to the future, the first essential is to begin healing the wounds of this nation. To put the bitterness and divisions of the recent past behind us and to rediscover those shared ideals that lie at the heart of our strength and unity as a great and as a free people.

By taking this action, I hope that I will have hastened the start of that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America. I regret deeply any injuries that may have been done in the course of the events that led to this decision. I would say only that if some of my judgments were wrong -- and some were wrong -- they were made in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation.

To those who have stood with me during these past difficult months, to my family, my friends, the many others who joined in supporting my cause because they believed it was right, I will be eternally grateful for your support. And to those who have not felt able to give me your support, let me say I leave with no bitterness toward those who have opposed me, because all of us in the final analysis have been concerned with the good of the country, however our judgments might differ.

So let us all now join together in affirming that common commitment and in helping our new President succeed for the benefit of all Americans. I shall leave this office with regret at not completing my term but with gratitude for the privilege of serving as your President for the past five and a half years. These years have been a momentous time in the history of our nation and the world. They have been a time of achievement in which we can all be proud, achievements that represent the shared efforts of the administration, the Congress and the people. But the challenges ahead are equally great. And they, too, will require the support and the efforts of the Congress and the people, working in cooperation with the new Administration.

We have ended America's longest war. But in the work of securing a lasting peace in the world, the goals ahead are even more far-reaching and more difficult. We must complete a structure of peace, so that it will be said of this generation -- our generation of Americans -- by the people of all nations, not only that we ended one war but that we prevented future wars.

We have unlocked the doors that for a quarter of a century stood between the United States and the People's Republic of China. We must now insure that the one-quarter of the world's people who live in the People's Republic of China will be and remain, not our enemies, but our friends.

In the Middle East, 100 million people in the Arab countries, many of whom have considered us their enemy for nearly 20 years, now look on us as their friends. We must continue to build on that friendship so that peace can settle at last over the Middle East and so that the cradle of civilization will not become its grave. Together with the Soviet Union we have made the crucial breakthroughs that have begun the process of limiting nuclear arms. But, we must set as our goal, not just limiting, but reducing and finally destroying these terrible weapons, so that they cannot destroy civilization. And so that the threat of nuclear war will no longer hang over the world and the people. We have opened a new relation with the Soviet Union. We must continue to develop and expand that new relationship, so that the two strongest nations of the world will live together in cooperation rather than confrontation.

Around the world -- in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America, in the Middle East -- there are millions of people who live in terrible poverty, even starvation. We must keep as our goal turning away from production for war and expanding production for peace so that people everywhere on this earth can at last look forward, in their children's time, if not in our own time, to having the necessities for a decent life. Here, in America, we are fortunate that most of our people have not only the blessings of liberty but also the means to live full and good, and by the world's standards even abundant lives.

We must press on, however, toward a goal not only of more and better jobs but of full opportunity for every American, and of what we are striving so hard right now to achieve -- prosperity without inflation.

For more than a quarter of a century in public life, I have shared in the turbulent history of this evening. I have fought for what I believe in. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to discharge those duties and meet those responsibilities that were entrusted to me. Sometimes I have succeeded. And sometimes I have failed. But always I have taken heart from what Theodore Roosevelt once said about the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again because there is not effort without error and shortcoming, but who does actually strive to do the deed, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumphs of high achievements and with the worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

I pledge to you tonight that as long as I have a breath of life in my body, I shall continue in that spirit. I shall continue to work for the great causes to which I have been dedicated throughout my years as a Congressman, a Senator, Vice President and President, the cause of peace -- not just for America but among all nations -- prosperity, justice and opportunity for all of our people.

There is one cause above all to which I have been devoted and to which I shall always be devoted for as long as I live.

When I first took the oath of office as President five and a half years ago, I made this sacred commitment: to consecrate my office, my energies, and all the wisdom I can summon to the cause of peace among nations. I've done my very best in all the days since to be true to that pledge. As a result of these efforts, I am confident that the world is a safer place today, not only for the people of America but for the people of all nations, and that all of our children have a better chance than before of living in peace rather than dying in war.

This, more than anything, is what I hoped to achieve when I sought the Presidency.

This, more than anything, is what I hope will be my legacy to you, to our country, as I leave the Presidency.

To have served in this office is to have felt a very personal sense of kinship with each and every American.

In leaving it, I do so with this prayer: May God's grace be with you in all the days ahead.

« [...] Dans toutes les décisions que j'ai prises dans ma vie politique, j'ai toujours essayé de faire ce qui était le mieux pour le pays. A travers la longue et difficile période du Watergate, j'ai estimé qu'il était de mon devoir de persévérer, de faire tous les efforts possibles pour mener à terme le mandat pour lequel vous m'avez élu.

Dans les derniers jours pourtant, il m'a paru évident que je n'avais plus de soutien politique assez fort pour justifier de cet effort.(...)

Donc, je démissionnerai de la présidence demain à midi. Le vice-président Ford prêtera le serment de Président à la même heure dans ce bureau.

Je quitterai ce bureau avec regret de ne pas terminer mon mandat, mais avec gratitude pour le privilège d'avoir servi en tant que votre Président au cours des cinq dernières années et demie.

Ces années ont été une importante période de l'histoire de notre pays et du monde.

Nous avons mis fin à la guerre la plus longue qu'ait connu l'Amérique. Mais l'œuvre qui consiste à assurer une paix durable dans le monde est encore bien plus grande et plus difficile à réussir. Nous devons mettre sur pied une structure de paix afin que les peuples de tous les pays disent de cette génération d'Américains - notre génération - qu'elle a prévenu de futures guerres.

Nous avons rouvert les portes qui, pendant un quart de siècle, ont séparé les Etats Unis et la République populaire de Chine. Nous devons maintenant agir pour que le quart de la population mondiale qui vit en République populaire de Chine soit ou reste non notre ennemi, mais notre ami.(...)

Ensemble, avec l'Union Soviétique, nous avons fait des percées décisives qui ont entamé le processus de la limitation des armes nucléaires. Mais nous devons fixer comme but non une simple limitation, mais une réduction et finalement la destruction de ces armes terribles de façon qu'elles ne puissent pas détruire la civilisation, et que la menace de la guerre nucléaire ne soit plus suspendue au-dessus du monde et des peuples. Nous avons engagé de nouvelles relations avec l'Union Soviétique. Nous devons continuer à développer et à élargir ces nouvelles relations pour que les deux Nations les plus fortes du monde vivent en coopération plutôt qu'en confrontation.

Je vous promets, ce soir, qu'aussi longtemps qu'il y aura un souffle de vie dans mon corps, je continuerai à œuvrer pour les grandes causes auxquelles je me suis consacré au cours de mes années de mandats de représentant, de sénateur, de vice-président et de Président.... »

Richard Nixon, 8 août 1974