

The original documents are located in Box C10, folder “Presidential Handwriting, 1/22/1975” of the Presidential Handwriting File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

FG 1

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN. *[Handwritten initials]*

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 22, 1975

[Handwritten signature]

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DONALD RUMSFELD

FROM: ROBERT A. GOLDWIN *[Handwritten initials]*

Here is the first try at writing up our conversation of last Sunday. You will recognize much of it as your own first responses to my questions. In some cases I have made an attempt to amplify your thoughts and follow some of the implications.

I recommend as the second step that you give me your additional thoughts and comments and I will then make a second effort. We can continue in that way until you are satisfied.

By this process, we can also develop an agenda for the next conversation, and so continue in your search for over-arching themes.

Attachment

Q. What would you say is your chief characteristic, as a man and as a political leader?

A. I like people. I like to talk to them, I like to listen to them, I like to ask them questions. It is a pleasure for me to discuss things with all sorts of people.

And when a decision has to be reached, my practice is to be sure that everyone has a chance to have his full say. I think it is better to develop a consensus than to impose a decision on unwilling people.

I enjoy doing things that way, and I also think it is the most constructive way. The spirit of the American system requires that we listen to the other fellow and appreciate his viewpoint, what his legitimate interests are.

In Congress you conduct affairs every day with people whose thoughts and convictions are different from yours, but the national interest demands that you work smoothly with these people. When I disagree with someone, he goes away with a good feeling that I knew what he was saying and why he was saying it.

I've known people in public life who would make you mad at them even when they were saying yes. They usually don't last long.

America is made up of a great diversity of interests, and we have to develop unity out of the competition of these differing groups and persons. That's why we have to be strong in the skills of conciliation and co-operation.

Q. How does someone learn these skills? Is it something that should be studied or taught in schools?

A. For me, it has come out of my long years of experience in Congress. Of course, some Congressmen and other political leaders never learn it no matter how long and hard they try. Some don't seem to try. I guess you have to have the temperament, and you have to like people, as I do. Maybe it can be taught or learned from books. Harry Truman said he learned a lot of his political savvy from

reading history books. Basically it is a matter of understanding how American government works and how important it is always to try to influence the actions of the majority in order to get results that are good for the people.

Q. Your mention of being part of the majority reminds us that through just about your entire congressional career you were part of a Republican minority. Has that influenced your view of the political system and your role in it?

A. Yes, I was in the minority for all but two years of my congressional career. I would have been very pleased to have more majority experience. But I think what we have been talking about is the same, whichever party you are in. Many bills that pass are supported by a majority of both parties. And the majorities keep shifting, with a different composition from bill to bill. At all times it is important to use the skills of compromise and to be trustworthy in your dealings with others, those who support you and those who oppose you.

Q. The word compromise has a bad connotation as well as a favorable one. It often means that someone abandons principle for selfish or unscrupulous advantage. But you always speak of compromise approvingly. Do you see a danger in being too ready to compromise?

A. In a political career it is very important to stand by your principles, to stand for something, and to follow a meaningful course. Without that you have no sense of direction, no rudder, no map. This matter of compromise is complicated, but not too complicated for anyone to understand-- and if you are in political life as your lifetime career, you had better understand it, or you will make a mess of things.

There are two dangers. One is that you will have no principles, no scruples, and just make any deal that advances your interests or your career. That is contemptible. I have no respect for such people. The other danger is that you will be too rigid and inflexible, too sure that you are right and that everyone who disagrees with you is wrong.

Rigid people find it hard to modify their position and compromise. They fail to influence the majority. You have to be able to agree with others in part in order to get them to agree with you in part.

One reason that I like people and get along with them is that I find most people make a lot of sense when they explain why they are working for some result. They might not have hold of the whole truth, but there is usually a lot of truth in what they are saying, and that makes it easier to co-operate and compromise with them.

Some people are too self-righteous. It is important to live by sound principles, but some people confuse the rightness of their principles and their own rightness. I try not to be self-righteous. A self-righteous man finds it hard to compromise with anyone. A righteous man can compromise with other decent people.

Q. Mr. President, what comments do you have on the upheaval now taking place in Congress, the ouster of Committee Chairmen?

A. I have mixed emotions about it. There is some cruelty in turning out men who have served for a long time and worked hard for what they think is right. On the other hand, I take into account that some of them were inflexible and unyielding. I also take into account that these new people in Congress feel they have an important mission and changing the chairmen and the way of appointing them is important to their objectives.

The real question, and we'll have to wait a while for the answer, is whether the government will run better now. Time will tell. These things cannot be judged in the abstract. I judge by results. Will the legislation be better or worse? Will relations with the Administration be better or worse? Will there be a stalemate of forces when the needs of the Nation require leadership? The verdict on whether what is happening now is good or bad will depend on the answers to those questions.