

Jimmy Carter Remembers Gerald Ford

CNN

Jan. 3, 2007

Transcript

JIMMY CARTER, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: "For myself and for our nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."

Those were the first words I spoke as president. And I still hate to admit that they received more applause than any other words in my inaugural address.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: You learn a lot about a man when you run against him for president, and when you stand in his shoes, and assume the responsibilities that he has borne so well, and perhaps even more after you both lay down the burdens of high office and work together in a nonpartisan spirit of patriotism and service.

My staff and my diary notes, as I prepared for this eulogy, reveal a list of more than 25 different projects on which Jerry and I have shared leadership responsibilities.

He and I were both amused by a "New Yorker" cartoon a couple years ago. This little boy is looking up at his father. And he says, "Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be a former president."

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: Jerry and I frequently agreed that one of the greatest blessings that we had, after we left the White House during the last quarter-century was the intense personal friendship that bound us together.

During our closely contested political campaign, as Don just reminded me, we habitually referred to each other as "my distinguished opponent." And, for my own benefit, while I was president, I kept him fully informed about everything that I did in the domestic or international arena.

In fact, he was given a thorough briefing almost every month from the head of my White House staff or my national security adviser. And Jerry never came to the Washington area without being invited to have lunch with me at the White House.

We always cherished those memories of now perhaps a long-lost bipartisan interrelationship.

Jerry Ford and I shared a lot. We both served in the U.S. Navy, he on battleships, I on submarines, as junior officers. In fact, it was my profession. And we both enjoyed our unexpected promotion to commander in chief.

Each of us had three sons. And then our prayers were answered...

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: ... and we had a daughter.

And we both married women who were good-looking, smart, and extremely independent.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: As president, I relished his sound advice. And he often, although, I must say, reluctantly, departed from the prevailing opinion of his political party to give me support on some of my most difficult challenges.

For many of these, of course, he had helped to lay the foundation, including the Panama Canal treaties, nuclear armaments control with the Soviet Union, normalized diplomatic relations with China, and also the Camp David accords.

In fact, on a helicopter in flight from Camp David back to Washington, President Anwar Sadat, Prime Minister Menachem Begin and I made one telephone call, to Gerald Ford, to tell him that we had reached peace between Israel and Egypt.

President Ford and I also shared a commitment to force the Soviet Union to comply with its promise to respect human rights within the Helsinki agreement, which gave strength to brave dissidents behind the Iron Curtain, and helped to undermine Soviet tyranny from within.

Our mutual respect, which I have described, blossomed into a valued personal friendship during our shared trip to attend the funeral of President Anwar Sadat in Egypt. We formed a personal bond while lamenting on the difficulty of unexpectedly defeated candidates trying to raise money to build presidential libraries.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: That's what bound us together most firmly, I think, for the rest of our days.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: In the early days of the **Carter Center**, Jerry joined me as co-chairman in all of our important conferences and projects. And I never declined an opportunity to help him with his own post-presidential plans.

We enjoyed each other's private company. And he and I commented often that, when we were traveling somewhere in an automobile or airplane, we hated to reach our destination, because we enjoyed the private times that we had together.

More -- one of our most successful and little-known joint efforts, by the way, was agreeing on how to respond to the literally hundreds of invitations from people who claimed that all the presidents

were going to participate in an event. And, after a private telephone conversation, we would quickly let them know that at least two of us would not be attending.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: Yesterday, on the flight here from Washington, Rosalynn and I were thrilled when one of his sons came to tell us that the greatest gift he received from his father was his faith in Jesus Christ.

It is true that Jerry and I shared a common commitment to our religious faith, not just in worshipping the same savior, but in attempting, in our own personal way, to achieve reconciliation within our respective denominations.

We took to heart the admonition of the Apostle Paul that Christians should not be divided over seemingly important, but tangential issues, including sexual preferences and the role of women in the church, things like that.

We both felt that Episcopalians, Baptists and others should live together in harmony, within the adequate and common belief that we are saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ, that we are saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ.

One of my proudest moments was at the commemoration of the 200th birthday of the White House, when two noted historians both declared that the Ford-Carter friendship was the most intensely personal between any two presidents in history.

This close relationship extended to our spouses, as Betty worked on drug and alcohol abuse, and Rosalynn addressed the challenges of mental illness. And, when those two women descended on Washington together, few members of Congress could resist their combined lobbying assault.

(LAUGHTER)

CARTER: The four of us learned to love each other.

In closing, let me extend, on behalf of Rosalynn and me and Jack and Chip and Jeffrey and Amy, and our 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandson, our personal sympathy and love to Betty and Mike and Jack and Steve and Susan, and all of your extended family.

The tens of thousands of people who lined the highway yesterday and today were expressing this mutual love which we share for President Jerry Ford.

I still don't know any better way to express it than the words I used almost exactly 30 years ago. For myself and for our nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he did to heal our land.

#####