

DEAR FRIENDS

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Greetings:

No sooner does a new president assume office, than the media is conjecturing whether he will make it for a second term. They run constant popularity polls. Is he slipping - how many percentage points has he lost - who looms as a contender?

If it is bugging Jimmy Carter, it is nothing new. Go back a mere 20 years to the dismal administration of D D Eisenhower. The nation had been in and out of tough recessions like a yo-yo. Ike alternated between the hospital and the golf course. His Secy of State, John Foster Dulles, had been over the globe like another yo-yo, almost assuming presidential power. High jinks at the White House led to the departure of Ike's chief of staff, Sherman Adams. And Tricky Dick, who had squirmed out of a tight spot to become VP, was grabbing for the presidential nomination.

Came 1960 and JF Kennedy was catapulted into the White House. Huge infusions of Papa Joe's wealth and public relations expertise did it. Jack jostled aside men of stature, made a dubious alliance with LBJ and with Daley help squeaked thru to win by a hair-thin margin. Those were the days of Camelot. Ask not what your country can do for you. The Kennedys cavorted at the White House. Touch football and pushing full clad guests into the swimming pool. Other guests delighted the president with sub rosa trysts we didn't hear about then.

Then the CIA fouled up the Bay of Pigs - as it has done before and since in other dark escapades. A more sober mood settled on the White House in eyeball to eyeball with the Roosians. It was said that Jack faced down Khrushchev. Mebbe so. Meanwhile campaign promises to minorities were not coming to fruition. Leaders like Martin Luther King were restive - said the Kennedy team talked a great game, but that was all.

After the assassination of JFK, LBJ took over. A record output of legislation. Bills bursting in air - and soon bombs bursting in Vietnam. A debacle followed that the big Texan could not take. He did not run in 1968. HHH faced Nixon. This time, Tricky Dick squeaked thru. What a president. Commentators like Jules Pfeiffer almost blew their minds. This was a president? This was foreign policy? This was domestic policy? The shambles ended in Watergate. But for a stroke of luck, who knows where R Nixon may have dragged this nation.

As Nixon left in disgrace, Gerald Ford came on as president. A tough assignment for any man - even the best and wisest - and Gerald Ford never was the best or the wisest. He tried. He stumbled and bumbled. He pardoned Nixon. That slippery one got out from under while his unsavory crew faced indictments, prison and heavy legal fees. It could have been worse. They deserved worse. Today, only Mitchell and Haldeman are still in jail. We have an epidemic of book authoring. The squire of San Clemente, amid his guards and a host of services paid for by the American taxpayer, languishes on his estate. An occasional nitwit asks if Richard Nixon has suffered enough. Suffered? He garners fat fees for broadcasts and a book that makes a mockery of fact.

Which brings us to Jimmy Carter. No president can be all that everyone demands of him. He must be political. Fence with Congress, the media, kid big Labor and big Business, try to restrain monopoly and big Money, make a pass at social reform and a sane tax policy, curb the bureaucracy, even keep a wary eye on the military-industrial complex that Ike warned about with his wisest words. But the way of the president is always strewn with diatribe and criticism. Nothing delighted Roosevelt haters more than the latest off-color story about FDR or Eleanor. Go back thru history and there is a torrent of abuse against the man in the White House - even A Lincoln, Andy Jackson, T Jefferson and old Geo Washington himself. We have had many different presidents, and many opinions about them, but a nation that could survive a Nixon, will survive any presidency.

--- Joseph Zashin