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**Bill's
Bulletin
Board**

By Bill Rea

As I've stated here before, I'm something of a casual student of the American presidency. In fact, I could name all 42 men who have held that office, something I do frequently because I do so enjoy showing off.

That being stated, I was saddened when I turned on CNN late Boxing Day evening and learned that Gerald Ford had passed away.

Political alignments and Canadian national parochialism notwithstanding, I always liked Ford, and have always maintained the feeling that he was not given a fair chance running the show, although the truth is I don't think a guy like that would have ever had any chance, fair or otherwise, of getting the job by conventional means. He was, after all, only a congressman who was appointed into his position of power, not elected to it.

Ford was the first president I saw being sworn in, and this was right on the heels of the resignation of Richard Nixon, which climaxed tons and tons of

speculation. I had been glued to the TV for about a week, waiting for bulletins to cut in with the latest news of possible resignation. My father, who hated the thought of any teen frittering away summer vacation in front of what he called "the idiot box" (this was August remember), suffered with a certain amount of silence.

One of my strongest memories of that period was the actual swearing in, with the Chief Justice, Warren Burger, actually performing the official introduction of the new president. It took a couple of seconds for me to get my head around the fact that this guy really was the president, and from what I have subsequently read, I wasn't the only one with such feelings.

Ford never struck me as being especially statesman-like. I remember some of his speeches, recalling his delivery was hard to take seriously. I think he did okay when he was reading from a text, but he seemed to stumble when he ad libbed.

I don't think the guy was a good verbal communicator, certainly not on a level with a Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton. It's political reality that if you can't effectively get your message across, you might as well forget about getting elected to high public office.

He was just a little better when it came to expressing himself in written words. It's been many years since I read his presidential memoirs. I remember they were informative, but not very well-written. But from other sources I've read, the man was superb at dealing with people one-on-one. He was also enough of an administrator to surround himself with a lot of very competent people, and yet not be intimidated by the talent pool surrounding him. How many of us have had many bosses we could say that about? Some people haven't even had one.

Needless to say, I believe Ford was probably the most underrated president of my lifetime.

Not counting the current guy, there have been 10 presidents since the end of the Second World War. My admittedly casual historical assessment rates these men according to tiers.

Two of them, Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, I believe achieved greatness. I put Truman, one of my heroes from history, on top because I believe a person of his qualities and talents is always going to step up and

be useful. I think Reagan was more of a man who answered a need of a particular time.

The next tier takes in the two men I believe performed ably in office despite being handed impossible situations. I put Ford into that group, along with Lyndon Johnson. I believe it was in the cards for some president to politically self-destruct over Vietnam, and Johnson just happened to be so positioned. The doves creamed him because he didn't pull out, and the hawks would have creamed him had he tried.

Ford found himself taking command of a situation that could have metaphorically been described as the basement of an outhouse, especially from the point of view of a Republican. Added to the post-Watergate mess he had to clean up, the economy was tanking on his watch. Yet he found the gumption to step up.

Despite conventional wisdom, I'm inclined to think the pardon Ford granted Nixon did not cost him the presidency in 1976. I believe a lot of American voters who said they voted for someone else because of that carried votes that any Republican would have been hard

pressed to get in light of the Watergate mess. Indeed, I'm inclined to think the pardon gave him a fighting chance in '76. What hope would any Republican have

had if the chief figure of Watergate had still been before the courts?

Although there was a lot of anger at the time over that pardon, I think a lot of Americans (and others who watched the events unfold) have gone beyond it all. Indeed, I think there's a certain amount of shame being felt over the way people acted then.

"The law is the law and Nixon as the chief magistrate of the people was obligated to set a higher standard of behaviour yadda yadda etc., and give me a break" was what people had to officially put on the record to make it all sound legalistic, when what many of them really wanted was to see Nixon out in some well-guarded field swinging a sledge hammer and breaking rocks.

By issuing the pardon, Ford was trying to put all this in the past and make a country and the rest of the western world move on.

Ford came along just as I was about to start Grade 11, arguably the happiest year I spent as a student. I also took a class in world politics that year. Needless to say, people in high public office, like Trudeau, Ford and Breshnev, provided a lot of the background material for one of the most enjoyable classes I ever took.

Ford took a lot of needling in those days, both from my classmates and the rest of the world. But he took it and moved on. So did the world.

Editorial

Time will tell if Baird is good for the environment

If nothing else, Prime Minister Stephen Harper last week demonstrated he can smell the coffee as well as the next man.

It didn't take any particular gift of intuition for the PM to realize that Canadians are very concerned about their environment these days. Small wonder, considering the the recent green Christmas and unseasonably warm temperatures we've experienced this winter.

Thus it was important for Harper not only to act, but to be seen to be acting, and switching environment ministers is a pretty visible move.

But we will have to wait and see if it's effective.

The environment is not that easy to understand, either in terms of its mechanics or the philosophy many of us have regarding it.

With the exception of a few very foolish people, we

are all concerned about the environment, and want to see things done to protect it. The problem is, of course, that there is often disagreement on the best way to accomplish that. As well, with such disagreement, there is room for arrogance, with too many people taking the attitude that since they care so much about the environment, everyone should agree with them. Those who dare to disagree can often expect to have all sorts of nasty things said to and about them.

It requires no great environmental knowledge or even concern to call one's self an environmentalist, to put one's name down as a member of an environmental organization, to wear snazzy green T-shirts at a political convention or to sit as minister of the environment.

Baird, thus far, has demonstrated only his ability to run government min-

istries at the federal and provincial level, and come to the attention of the current prime minister in a positive way.

His former caucus colleague Garth Turner made an interesting observation about him in his famous

Letter to the Editor

Thanks from food bank

A sincere and heartfelt thank you to the people, businesses and organizations in King Township for a truly successful food drive through this Christmas season.

The amazing response from our township has filled our shelves to overflowing. Thanks to your generosity, in addition to being able to serve people from our own township, we have been able to share some of our food with other local organizations in urgent need, such as a women's centre, some families in York Region

blog earlier this week: "I never heard the word 'environment' come out of his mouth before the cabinet shuffle last week."

Who knows? Baird might turn out to be just the thing that is needed to do the environment some good.

dealing with the AIDS crisis, a street outreach van, as well as other local food banks.

Thank you so much to the many businesses, schools and other organizations throughout King who ran food drives to help our friends and neighbours in need. A special thank you also to all the volunteers who spent countless hours working at the food bank depot, sorting and packing food in the busy days leading up to Christmas, and in the holidays right after.

To all who have con-

tributed, to all who have helped and to all who have been involved, a truly sincere and heartfelt thank you, from those of us who run the food bank, and particularly on behalf of all the people who depend on our help.

As always, if we can be of help to anyone, please do call up. We are here to serve. Wishing you all of God's blessings for the new year, and with a very grateful heart,

Fr. Suren Nathan,
King Township Food Bank