

Jerry Ford's political style served the nation better

by *The Detroit News*

As the nation mourns President Gerald R. Ford, it is worth remembering part of what it has lost with him - a political style in which battles are hard-fought, but without rancor or personal animosity.

After all, Ford entered politics as a congressman from a western Michigan district with bipartisan help. He came back from World War II believing the United States must be actively engaged in world affairs. The congressman from his district was an old-line isolationist Republican. Ford set about to depose him with help from both sympathetic Republicans and Democrats.

John Feikens, now a senior federal judge, recalls that when Ford a few years ago attended a ceremony at the Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University, he walked up to former United Auto Workers President Leonard Woodcock and joked, "Are you sorry for what you did?"

Woodcock was one of the Democrats who helped Ford unseat the incumbent congressman in Ford's first bid for office back in the 1940s, Feikens says.

Ford's desire for a new style of inclusive, outward-looking Republicanism after World War II was behind his decision to give his early support to Dwight Eisenhower rather than Ohio's U.S. Sen. Robert Taft, who had been a relentless foe of Franklin Roosevelt in the U.S. Senate and was the early frontrunner for the 1952 GOP presidential nomination, Feikens notes. The judge served as state Republican chairman in the 1950s and was an Eisenhower activist in the early 1950s.

Feikens compares Ford to the late George Romney and William Milliken, two Republican Michigan governors who enjoyed broad support among citizens of both major parties.

Ford was minority leader in the U.S. House and engaged in his share of political donnybrooks. But as

one of his Michigan GOP House colleagues and a later U.S. senator, Robert Griffin, notes, "everybody liked Jerry Ford - even the Democrats."

Michigan's senior Democrat in the House, John Dingell, observed in a Detroit News commentary that though Ford, as minority leader, battled former President Lyndon Johnson daily, "he never once stopped being a gentleman and never once regressed into the vitriolic partisanship that is commonplace in today's political debates."

Jerry Ford's political style was healthier for the nation and the political process. One of the best ways to remember him would be for his successors to revive that style.

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