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Editorials

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A life of service draws to a close

Former President Jimmy Carter, who at 98 halted medical treatment and recently entered hospice, rightly has been held up as an exemplar of what post-presidential years can look like.

Since leaving office in 1981, his life has been one of extraordinary public service and good works, large and small. Into his 90s — even after being diagnosed with cancer that had spread to his brain in 2015 — Carter continued to wield hammers and haul lumber to build homes for his beloved charity, Habitat for Humanity.

In 1982 he founded the Carter Center, which has become a force for preventing and resolving conflicts around the globe, aiding freedom and democracy by monitoring elections, and improving global health through the eradication and treatment of tropical diseases such as Guinea worm and river blindness that have afflicted millions in developing countries.

In 2002 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to negoti-

ate peace, his unyielding focus on human rights worldwide, and his work on social justice, fueled by a passionate belief in equality.

Reassessing Jimmy Carter's presidency reveals noteworthy accomplishments.

It should be noted that these efforts all had their roots in a presidency that needed the passage of time to assess properly.

For the most part, Carter's single term in office was deemed a failure. Politically crippled by soaring double-digit inflation, a gas crisis spawned by the nation's overdependence on foreign oil, and what came to be known as the Iran hostage crisis, Carter lost

the White House in a landslide to Ronald Reagan, who promised to usher in "Morning in America."

But thankfully, Carter has lived long enough to see his presidency recognized for its prescience and lasting positive impact on this country and the world.

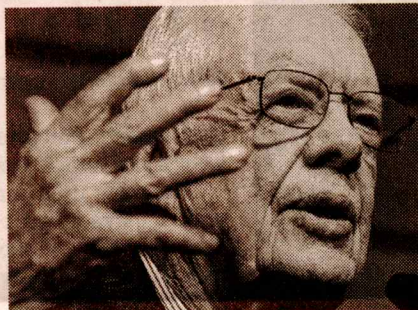
That world looked very different in 1976 when Carter defeated Gerald Ford, the unelected vice president who replaced disgraced President Richard Nixon. Carter was well-positioned to turn the page on the Nixon-Watergate era. Down-home and deeply religious, Carter was a disciplined, conscientious former naval officer. As a farmer, he was accustomed to hard work and long hours.

From the beginning, he was a study in contrasts. He kept a tight rein on budgets, often vetoing Democratic projects he considered "pork," yet he was committed to a stronger social safety net and a safer environment.

Larry Jacobs, director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota, told an editorial writer that while Carter has been celebrated for his post-presidential service, his presidential years typically have gotten short shrift.

"But he has a surprisingly strong presidential record," Jacobs said. "He was a pioneer in moving us away not only from our dependence on foreign oil, but fossil fuels in general. He pushed through the first subsidies for wind and solar. He was mocked for wearing a sweater and urging Americans to turn down the thermostat. But that's what presidents should do — lead by example. Carter was willing to do that, even though he took a lot of criticism for it."

Carter installed the first solar panels at the White House in the late 1970s. He attempted to launch the nation's first alternative-energy program and successfully



Jimmy Carter in 2018.

pushed through Superfund legislation to clean abandoned toxic waste dumps.

Through tenacious effort, Carter brokered a monumental peace treaty between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. He launched the Department of Education and Department of Energy and created the Federal Emergency Management Agency, now a staple of the nation's emergency response system.

Carter's Alaska Land Act added millions of acres to the nation's protected wilderness. He launched the judicial career of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, appointing the civil-rights attorney to the U.S. Court of Appeals' powerful D.C. Circuit. He would nominate more women and people of color to federal positions than all his predecessors combined.

Jacobs noted that Carter led the transformation from mechanical weapons systems to a modern era of cruise missiles and stealth technology, immeasurably strengthening the military, to the dismay of a post-Vietnam War Democratic Party. His emphasis on human rights would become a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy and would be followed by every president who came after him. "Carter was building strong power, but also recognized the potency of soft powers and how integral it was to this country's values," Jacobs said.

Minnesotans have long had a unique connection to Carter: The Georgian selected Minnesota's Walter Mondale as his running mate. Together, the two men would remake the vice presidency into a powerful position, changing the nature of that office.

Jacobs said Carter selected Mondale partly because they held common values, including "a fundamental belief in civil rights and the rights of women." The two men, he said, would remain close their entire lives.

Carter, Jacobs said, infused his presidency with humility, frugality, a religious grounding that went beyond rhetoric, and an abiding belief in freedom and compassion. "In so many ways, this was a man who reflected the best of America," Jacobs said. "America became a very different place because of Jimmy Carter. It's about time he was recognized for the heroic and transformational leadership he provided."

This nation owes a debt of gratitude to a remarkable man who has lived his faith, held fast to his ideals and served humanity throughout his life.

Editorial Board members are David Banks, Jill Burcum, Scott Gillespie, Denise Johnson, Patricia Lopez, John Rash and D.J. Tice. Star Tribune Opinion staff members Maggie Kelly and Elena Neuzil also contribute, and Star Tribune Publisher and CEO Michael J. Klingensmith serves as an adviser to the board.