Warren Harding Essay, Research Paper

Warren Harding Warren Gamaliel Harding was the twenty-ninth president ofthe United States. He was the sixth president to die in office.Harding was a tall, handsome man with a resounding voice and apleasing personality. At the time he was nominated forpresident, he was not widely known. He had become prominent inOhio as a newspaper editor, and had been elected to the statesenate. The conservative wing of his political party had foundhim a safe, dependable man. He had shown no particular abilityexcept the ability to attract and to get votes. Harding received the Republican party’s nomination forpresident at the Chicago Convention of 1920. Harding and hisvice president, Calvin Coolidge, were elected by an overwhelmingmajority of the popular and electoral votes over his opponents,James M. Cox and Franklin D. Roosevelt. From the beginning of his administration, Harding dependedheavily on his Congress and Cabinet to provide leadership. Hechose several qualified men to serve in his cabinet, but he alsochose many cabinet members because they were his friends orbecause he owed them political debts. Many of them proved to becompletely unworthy of trust or of high office. Harding declared early in his presidency that it was thegovernment’s return to normalcy. His election was interpreted tomean that the people did not want either the Versailles Treaty orthe League of Nations. The United States made separate treatieswith Germany and its allies, and refused to take part in worldaffairs. Harding believed that the U.S. should take part in theWorld Court, but at the same time he approved of limitationswhich would have made the Court almost powerless by separating itcompletely from the League of Nations. The most important achievement of Harding’s administrationwas the Disarmament Conference which met in Washington in 1921.Popular demand, heard through the Senate, initiated thisconference. The people wanted to put an end to the navalcompetition that had sprung up between the United States and

Japan, but the administration broadened the scope of theconference. It included an effort to limit the more dangerouspolitical and economic rivalries in the Far East. All theimportant nations took part in this conference, and agreed tolimit their armaments, but when some nations were ready to rearm,the agreement did not stop them from doing so. In domestic affairs, Harding’s administration followed astrongly conservative policy. The government had a hands-offattitude toward business. Taxes on high incomes were reduced.Duties on imports were raised by the Fordney-McCumber Act. Thegovernment took the side of business in its struggles with labor,and the Department of Justice hunted down radicals wherever theycould be found. Harding vetoed the first bonus law, mainlybecause he believed that the bonus was financially unsound. Meanwhile, important events were taking place behind thescenes. In May, 1921, Secretary Fall persuaded President Hardingto sign an order which gave the Department of the Interiorauthority over certain oil reserves in the West. These reserves,known as Teapot Dome and Elk Hills, belonged to the United StatesNavy. The Department of the Interior then proceeded to leasethese reserves to private oil companies. It was later provedthat Secretary Fall had accepted a bribe for the transfer ofnaval oil reserves to private interests, and he was sent toprison. Secretary Denby was also involved in the scandal. Soonafter the leases were signed, Senator Robert La Follette demandeda Senate investigation. Agents of the Department of Justice andthe Veterans’ Bureau were accused of dishonest practices. TheSenate obtained information that could have had Hardingimpeached. In 1923, Harding fell ill with food poisoning during a crosscountry speechmaking tour. He was exhausted and developedpneumonia. He seemed to be recovering. Then he died on August 2.The exact cause of his death is not known. His most important achievement was the Disarmament Conference of1921. It was good because it limited arms in many powerfulcountries.

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