

Wrapping Up the Nixon Administration

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CONGRESS TOOK SOME necessary steps last week to assert the public interest in winding up the leftover business of the Nixon administration in an orderly, expeditious way. Most important, both houses acted to protect the tapes and records of the Nixon presidency, a mass of potential evidence which the Ford administration had rashly agreed to put under Mr. Nixon's personal control. The Senate passed a bill which expressly overrides that ill-advised agreement and places the materials in the protective custody of the government. While not resolving the controversial issue of ownership of the materials, the Senate bill solves the immediate problem by insuring that the tapes and documents will not be destroyed and will be available to the Special Prosecutor and other litigants in accord with normal legal processes. Although the House may not be able to take up the Senate bill until November, that body did vote to forbid the government to transfer any of the records to California until the questions of permanent custody and access have been resolved.

Still to be settled is what kind of final public accounting of the Watergate scandals and investigations should be made. The Senate has urged President Ford to make public the full Watergate record and the fruits of all official inquiries. Many believe that Special Prosecutor

Leon Jaworski is in the best position to make a final, comprehensive report. Mr. Jaworski, however, has suggested that without a new directive from Congress, he may not be able to report publicly his probe of Mr. Nixon's activities and the doings of others not indicted for any crime. There are questions of individual rights to be considered, along with the public interest in airing as much information as possible in a fair and comprehensible way. This is an item of unfinished business which the Senate Judiciary Committee should address.

Meanwhile, Congress is also pressing Mr. Nixon to wind down his own leftover official business and hasten his transition to private status. By slashing the funds for support of the former President from the requested \$850,000 to \$200,000 for this fiscal year, the full House and the Senate Appropriations Committee have shown a willingness to give Mr. Nixon his pension and some staff to answer mail, but not to perpetuate a large establishment at public expense. The Senate committee would also limit the staff which may be retained on the official payroll and detailed to Mr. Nixon. By taking such steps, Congress seems to be trying to avoid either petty vindictiveness or excessive generosity toward the former President, while sorting out what are legitimate public concerns and what is Mr. Nixon's private business now.