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Reaping the 'real' legacy of

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WASHINGTON — "It was all an act," said Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif. "He was just making a play for sympathy to get immunity."

Cranston was talking about President Nixon's emotional departure from the White House, including a session where Nixon sobbed openly before a group of congressmen that could decide if Nixon must face criminal prosecution, even jail.

More importantly, Cranston was reflecting a new hardcore cynicism that history may record as Nixon's real legacy. It is this disillusionment and disbelief — the instinct to suspect the worse — that will haunt President Ford and others who follow into the Oval Office.

Behind the applause for Ford's decency and calls for national unity, there is seething bitterness not likely to dissipate quickly.

By leaving the prestige of the presidency in tatters, Nixon has jeopardized the duration of Ford's

honeymoon with Congress, business, labor, the press and American voters.

"Quite frankly, I was surprised at the mail," said Sen. Edward Brooke, R-Mass., who thinks Nixon has suffered enough. Brooke's plan to put Congress on record against further prosecution produced a storm of written protests from Massachusetts, the only state Nixon lost in 1972.

But there is more venom in the mail to Sen. Paul Fannin, R-Ariz., who supported Nixon to the end.

"Repeal his pension, prosecute him and no parole with his jail sentence," said one letter from the heartland of arch-conservatism.

The feeling of betrayal among Nixon supporters, in and out of Washington, and confirmation of the darkest suspicions of anti-Nixon forces has undercut traditional American "forgive and forget."

No one has a bigger heart in Washington than Sen. Hubert Humphrey. Few have the Christian de-

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centy of Sen. George McGovern. But both these men, after reading the signs of wrath, backed off plans to co-sponsor the Brooke resolution.

Humphrey and others in Washington fear the national disillusionment caused by Watergate will grow worse because of the man who made the scandal. "I don't think Nixon can to this day admit that he did wrong and I'll bet he'll make a public fight of it," Humphrey said.

At the White House, Ford aides are quick to deny that Nixon will take to a platform to proclaim his innocence.

Such a step could shatter the current ceasefire between the White House and the outside world. "The President's biggest job now is to restore confidence in government and get some stability into the economy," said one of Ford's new economic aides. "Confidence is the best thing he's got going for him."

In the past, congressmen of both parties have been quick to give a new president the benefit of the

doubt, particularly in difficult times. But privately, key Democrats are smirking about Jerry Ford, the not-too-swift House GOP leader.

Add to that atmosphere this fall's congressional elections, with its partisan wrangling, and Ford's immediate future with Congress is not so bright.

Despite his early session with George Meany, organized labor counts Ford as an enemy.

While the editorial pages are now lavishing praise on Ford, front-line White House reporters have a colder eye for the new president. It was a common criticism in the past that the White House press corps were closer to cheerleaders for the presidency, swallowing whole presidential proclamations.

Of course, healthy skepticism has always been needed to penetrate the facade of Washington, a city where things never really are what they seem.

But for the time being, the Nixon legacy will be creating roadblocks for Ford at every turn.