

Subsidizing the Ex-President

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EVEN WITHOUT the premature pardon and the deal on the presidential tapes and papers, President Ford's request for \$850,000 to subsidize former President Nixon through this fiscal year would put the public's patience to a cruel test. Congressional mail and sentiment are running heavily against such generosity toward a man who resigned the presidency in disgrace in order to avoid being removed. Members of Congress can do little about the pardon except complain. Working out a more responsible arrangement for preservation of the papers and tapes may take some time. But the subsidies for Mr. Nixon can be dealt with at once—and a House appropriations subcommittee has gotten off to a good start by voting the other day to slash the \$850,000 request to \$398,000. A Democratic move to cut \$200,000 more was beaten by a single vote, and further cuts will undoubtedly be attempted on the House floor and in the Senate.

Under the presidential transition act, Mr. Nixon is eligible for some public aid and staff support during his first six months in private life. Under the Former Presidents Act, he is also entitled to a \$60,000 pension and \$96,000 for staff every year for the rest of his life. But the Ford administration's requests go far beyond such ample sums and, in fact, seem designed not so much to ease Mr. Nixon's transition into private status as to enable him to perpetuate the imperial style which he enjoyed while President. Thus the administration originally asked for \$40,000, later trimmed to \$25,000, for travel for Mr. Nixon and his family and staff—without revealing where they plan to go. The \$850,000 also included \$72,000 for telephone services, \$26,000 for miscellaneous, and \$172,000 for office supplies—presumably

for the San Clemente office which has already been so well equipped at the public's expense.

In addition to rejecting much of that largesse, the House subcommittee refused to grant \$110,000 which the administration wants to build and guard a vault for the papers and tapes of the Nixon presidency. As the panel concluded, it would be very wrong to go ahead with any aspect of the transfer of these records to San Clemente until new policies have been set to assure that all materials will be preserved and that the Special Prosecutor and others will have access as appropriate.

Congress may be doing what it can to keep the Nixon subsidies within reasonable bounds. But President Ford is also giving his predecessor some help which the Congress apparently can't cut. About 25 members of Mr. Nixon's personal staff—including Ronald Ziegler, Rose Mary Woods, a speechwriter, a maid, a valet and three military drivers—are still on the payroll of the White House and various agencies. Such detailing of federal employees to a former President is legal under the transition act for up to six months. So Mr. Ziegler could stay on the White House payroll until February 9, 1975. However lawful that may be, it compounds the impression that the new administration is almost incapable of doing anything that might be seen as inflicting a hardship or passing an adverse judgment upon the old.

Congress should not begrudge the former President the modest staff support he needs to answer mail. But neither should the public be required to underwrite a large establishment for Mr. Nixon and his family. The point of public help is to ease Mr. Nixon's transition to private life. The idea is not to perpetuate the standard of living to which Mr. Nixon became accustomed while he was abusing the powers of the presidency.