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The President Before Congress

President Ford's appearance before a House subcommittee to explain his pardon of former President Nixon was handled decorously and responsibly, recognizing the unprecedented nature of presidential testimony before Congress. While the appearance will not settle all controversy about the pardon, it did provide a good forum for a lengthy and detailed account of the event as seen from Mr. Ford's viewpoint.

We have been uneasy with the President's decision to testify personally, if only because we do not think the head of a co-equal branch of government should be under any obligation to submit to the kind of circus congressional hearings sometimes become. We still fear that enough that we hope no precedent has been set, but in this case the more appropriate criticism of the hearing might be the opposite one—that it accomplished little that could not have been done in, say, a presidential white paper.

As Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman made clear, it would take a searching examination indeed to satisfy every critic of the pardon. It is prob-

ably best that the President was not cross-examined that aggressively, but this means the appearance served as a forum for putting his views on record, and as a goodwill gesture toward Congress—both of which are of course useful enough purposes.

We have a sense, in any event, that anger over the pardon has subsided. Perhaps the timing and form of the announcement could have been handled in ways less damaging to President Ford, but an issue of timing hardly seems an overwhelming one. And of course, Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski has now backed the pardon in an interview with this newspaper. While suspicious disclosures might always reignite controversy, it seems the pardon may yet serve its purpose of putting Watergate behind us more quickly than otherwise might have been the case.

We can hope that in the end Mr. Ford's presidency will be judged not on the residue of Watergate, but on his handling of the economy and other deeply serious substantive issues which the nation will continue to face.