

House Democrats Urge Further Pardon Probe

By Bob Kuttner

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Democratic members of the House Judiciary subcommittee want to call additional witnesses to testify about the pardon of Richard M. Nixon, but there is little sentiment favoring a full-scale investigation.

In addition, an extensive probe is virtually ruled out by Republican opposition and the press of Judiciary Committee business, especially legislation that would request a final report from the special prosecutor's office.

Nonetheless, some members said yesterday they were not satisfied that all the questions had been fully laid to rest by President Ford's testimony.

Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.), who objected strenuously to the format permitting only five minutes of questions by each member, said afterward that some of Mr. Ford's answers were implausible.

"The committee has an obligation to continue the investigation," Rep. Holtzman said, adding that the President should be recalled if other witnesses leave questions unresolved. Rep. Holtzman and two of her Democratic colleagues, Reps. Don Edwards of California and Robert W. Kastenmeier of Wisconsin, said the panel should call at least three further witnesses — Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., who raised the pardon question with Mr. Ford before Mr. Nixon stepped down; Benton Becker, who negotiated the tapes agreement on behalf of President

Ford, and White House Counsel Philip W. Buchen.

Subcommittee Chairman William L. Hungate (Mo.) said Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski would be called to testify on the pardon and on other pending legislation involving the Nixon tapes and the Watergate investigation.

"There's substantial sentiment on the committee for calling other witnesses," Hungate said, "but this is all premature. The dust hasn't settled yet."

Hungate said he agreed that "there's certainly more work to be done."

Committee Republicans, however, generally praised President Ford's testimony, and said they saw no need for more hearings.

"I accept the President's explanation," said Iowa Republican Wiley Mayne, who had criticized the pardon itself. "Only someone who disbelieved the President would want to investigate further."

One representative who wants to investigate further was the sponsor of the resolution of inquiry which prompted Mr. Ford's appearance.

The representatives, Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.), said, "The President's explanation strains credulity. I'm pressing them to continue the investigation."

Mrs. Abzug said the subcommittee should call additional witnesses and subpoena all tapes of conversations between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Ford.

"There is still an unwarranted reverence because he's President of the United States, she added. "But this

President is not an elected President. He has to earn it."

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), sponsor of another resolution of inquiry, also was dissatisfied with yesterday's hearing.

"The committee didn't know precisely what questions to ask because there was no investigation preceding the hearing," Conyers said.

That point was also raised by Rep. Holtzman, who said she had repeatedly sought a staff investigation prior to the President's appearance. "We should have done the preliminary groundwork first to narrow the area of investigation," said Rep. Holtzman. "The President is a busy man, but the country wants answers."

According to congressional sources, "The highest levels of the House leadership on both sides of the aisle" advised against a full scale subcommittee investigation of the Nixon pardon.