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Ford to Testify Today on Pardon

Washington

President Ford, in a historic appearance this morning before a House subcommittee, will be questioned about the discussions, negotiations, legal advice and other circumstances that preceded his pardon of former President Nixon.

Mr. Ford has insisted publicly that he had "no secret reason" for issuing the pardon and that he granted it solely because he thought it was in the best interest of the country for him to do so.

But the pardon aroused considerable opposition in

the country, led to a marked drop in the new President's popularity and caused many members of Congress to challenge Mr. Ford's moves.

The nationally televised testimony before the House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on criminal justice is scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. PDT and last for about two hours.

Many historians believe this will be the first time any President has testified formally before a congressional panel.

Representative William L.

Hungate (Dem-Mo.), who is chairman of the subcommittee, said he expects Mr. Ford to deliver an opening statement addressing the 14 questions posed in the two resolutions of inquiry that prompted the hearing.

Hungate and the subcommittee's ranking Republican, Representative Henry P. Smith III of New York, are also planning brief opening statements, as are Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr., (Dem-N.J.), chairman of the full committee, and Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the committee's senior Republican.

Then, the nine members of the subcommittee will be allowed five minutes each to question the President.

Hungate said that the questions would be limited to the "parameters" of the subjects mentioned in the resolutions of inquiry.

He indicated, however, that he would probably permit inquiries on the government's agreement with Mr. Nixon that gives the former President control over access to his tape recordings and presidential papers.

One subcommittee member, Representative Elizabeth Holtzman (Dem-N.Y.), said she hopes to ask questions about the Ford administration's decisions to seek \$850,000 for Mr. Nixon's transition expenses and to permit the Justice Department to defend the former President in civil suits against him.

In countries with parliamentary systems of government, it is traditional practice for the chief executive to submit to questioning by legislators. However, researchers at the Library of Congress have found no documented precedent in United States history for a president's appearance such as

that scheduled by Mr. Ford.

The subcommittee members have said that they would question the President as they would any other witness, but many members of Congress have expressed doubts that the subcommittee would press Mr. Ford.

"We have to give the appearance of being deferential," one subcommittee member said.

Hungate said Mr. Ford would not be placed under oath because other witnesses in the subcommittee's current set of hearings on the pardon and related matters have not been sworn in.

The two resolutions of inquiry — a device through which Congress seeks specific information from the executive branch — were introduced by representatives Bella S. Abzug (Dem-N.Y.) and John Conyers Jr. (Dem-Mich.). -3/8

Mrs. Abzug's resolution poses ten questions to the President, relating to specific details of the decision-making process, including

persons the President may have consulted prior to granting the pardon.

Conyers's four questions were broader and asked for information on any agreement between the President and Mr. Nixon prior to the pardon and any knowledge Mr. Ford may have had about Mr. Nixon's health or criminal offenses that might have been committed by the former president.

In his news conference September 16, eight days after the pardon announcement, Mr. Ford said "there was no understanding, no deal between me and the former President nor between my staff and the staff of the former President, none whatsoever."

Mr. Ford said that he had no specific knowledge about the state of Mr. Nixon's health but that he had earned there was "the very real possibility" that Mr. Nixon would be charged with obstructing justice and other offenses.

There have been reports in the last ten days that Alexander M. Haig Jr., former chief of staff to Mr. Nixon and Mr. Ford, approached Mr. Ford ten days before Mr. Nixon resigned and asked if Mr. Ford would be prepared to pardon Mr. Nixon if he resigned.

According to these accounts, Mr. Ford refused to make any commitment.

New York Times