

Full Disclosure

REPUBLICAN MINORITY LEADER Gerald Ford seems, on the whole, to improve with knowing. A fairly solid impression of political integrity and good sense emerged at his appearance before the Senate Rules Committee last week. The American public, concerned to discover what kind of man has been appointed and is, presumably, about to be confirmed by Congress for the presidential succession, may well have gained a certain amount of reassurance from hearing Ford's views.

He doesn't believe a President can legally prevent or terminate a criminal prosecution involving the President, he told the committee, and the reporters at the hearing drew the impression, that Ford was adding his own weight to the pressure of Republicans who seek a fuller disclosure by President Nixon of the facts on Watergate.

Files, papers and memoranda in his possession that the Watergate Committee and the special prosecutor's office may seek must be divulged, a growing number of Republican Senators and Congressmen were saying last week, and Ford appeared to share their view, as we certainly do.

Senator Peter Dominick (Rep-Colo.), as conservative as they come, was adamant on this. "Nothing short of complete disclosure will be adequate to restore the confidence of the American people," he said.

We believe that Senator Dominick and, if he is of the same mind, Congressman Ford are zeroing in on one acceptable course for the President, that of full disclosure. Their views ought to be all the more persuasive to him in that they come from Republicans on Capitol Hill who have rejected suggestions for either the impeachment or the resignation of the President.

Another leading Republican figure, not from Capitol Hill but from the ranks of ex-attorneys general who have served Mr. Nixon, offers a similar judgment. Elliot Richardson, testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the point has been reached where any further claims of executive privilege in the investigations should be eliminated.

"I see no other way at this juncture," Richardson said, "of providing the reassurance necessary to the Congress and the American people that the special prosecutor can get to the bottom of all these matters." He did go on, however, to make the important reservation that the prosecutor's office, when seeking presidential evidence, should be required to show its materiality to the criminal investigations to guard against fishing expeditions.

SINCE HE IS NOT prepared to resign, and since Congress appears unprepared to try to remove him by impeachment, it may be that the line of reasoning of these men is the way to salvation for Richard Nixon. Full disclosure is now the key to restoring his name and credit with the American people and the authority of his Presidency.