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The Nixon Records

Clearing away the debris of the Nixon Administration is proving more difficult than cleaning up the Santa Barbara oil spill. A variety of questions relating to the former President's transgressions, records and upkeep are now making their tortured way through the Congress. A vote on the most important of these—the preservation of the Nixon records—is to come on the floor of the Senate today.

The measure up for Senate consideration is a commendable effort by the Government Operations Committee to modify the improvident agreement President Ford made with Mr. Nixon about White House tapes and papers. That agreement recognized Mr. Nixon's questionable claim of ownership of the materials and made access to them subject to his wishes, desires and assertions of legal right.

The principal aim of the proposed Senate bill is to give the United States immediate custody and control of the papers. It does not attempt to resolve questions of ownership or restitution, but it does provide for speedy judicial disposition of those questions.

The bill has two chief virtues. First, it forestalls transfer of custody of these records to Mr. Nixon. Second, it negates the provision of the Ford agreement permitting destruction of the White House tapes at the time of Mr. Nixon's death. Legal questions that are left unanswered by Mr. Nixon through his

tory. Preserving the records of the Nixon Administration is the first step toward answering those questions. The negotiations currently being carried on by Special Prosecutor Jaworski for access to the documents, are no adequate substitute for the Senate proposal. It should pass without delay.