STRAIGHT STUFF

DFW Hispanic Communicators’ Hispanic Heritage Month Fiesta will be Friday, Sept. 9, at the Latino Cultural Center in Dallas. Expect food, drinks, door prizes, art, music and (always) a little more. No charge. Info.

IABC Fort Worth local update: The keynote talk from Steve, author of The Systems Thinker, is set for 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Sept. 16 at the Fort Worth Club. Sponsorships are available at seven levels, from $2,500 to $300 (info here).

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Gerald Ford Issued a Presidential Pardon and Will Never be Forgiven for It

You can always forgive, but that doesn't mean people will forget. This is the hard lesson President Gerald Ford learned when he issued a pardon to Richard "I'm not a crook" Nixon.

Ford had been in office all of 31 days when he went on national television Sept. 8, 1974, to explain his decision. He was not the most eloquent to hold the office, but his 10-minute speech was remarkably thoughtful. He mentioned God and his conscience no fewer than five times each, expressed concern for Nixon's health and said, "I do believe that the buck stops here and that I cannot rely on public opinion polls to tell me what is right."

He noted that it might be years before his predecessor could receive a fair trial, during which "our people would again be polarized in their opinions." He concluded by saying, "I feel that Richard Nixon and his loved ones have suffered enough and will continue to suffer no matter what I do, no matter what we as a great and good nation can do together to make his goal of peace come true." Then he absolved Nixon of any crimes he may have committed as the nation's First Scofflaw.

Ford made his announcement on a Sunday morning, presumably when most politicians are in church soliciting campaign donations. After he finished, he left to play a round of golf while the White House phone operators watched the switchboard light up like a pinball machine.

Unfortunately for Ford, the angry calls were just the start. The New York Times, for example, called the pardon a "profoundly unwise, divisive and unjust act" that destroyed Ford's "credibility as a man of judgment, candor and competence." Then Jerald terHorst, Ford's press secretary and close friend, resigned in protest.

For his part, Ford had not done the best job of laying his PR groundwork. Only 11 days earlier, he told a reporter it would be "unwise" for him to make any commitment about a pardon. Not surprisingly, his public approval plummeted from 54 to 32, right about where most PR agencies rate today.

The media and the public were not Ford's only burdens. In October 1974 the first president to pardon his predecessor also became the first sitting president since Abraham Lincoln to testify before Congress. During the inquiry, Ford admitted that while he was vice president, he had discussed a pardon with Nixon, but he insisted there was no deal.

I'm not a crook

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Well, Excuse Me

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Worthy Award entries are due Sept. 4. Fame and glory await (but only if you turn something in).