

Nixon's Flights to Retreats Costly

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon's flights to his vacation retreats have cost the taxpayers more money and have burned more fuel than the White House has told the public.

It takes a jet fleet to move the President when he gets the notion to spend a few days at the shore. He usually flies in regal splendor in Air Force One, which he calls the Spirit of '76, accompanied by an identical Boeing 707 back-up plane and a Lockheed Jetstar.

In addition, two Sikorsky helicopters follow behind in case the President should want to hop around during his stay at the shore. The round trip to San Clemente takes 36 hours and uses up 10,800 gallons of fuel. Flying back and forth to Key Biscayne, the two choppers spend 15 hours in the air and drink up 4,800 gallons.

A typical round trip to San Clemente consumes a fantastic 11,000 gallons of fuel. For the Key Biscayne trip, the figure is 10,000 gallons. Three helicopters, with a total fuel consumption of 450 gallons, usually escort the President to Camp David and back.

Neither the White House nor the Air Force would tell us how much it costs the taxpayers to operate the presidential aircraft. However, the government charged the Republican Party \$1,300 an hour for the use of the presidential jet during the 1972 campaign. It costs slightly less

to fly Jetstars, still less for helicopters.

At the \$1,300-an-hour rate, it would cost the taxpayers \$26,000 to send the two presidential jets to San Clemente and back. Our sources estimate the operating costs for the Jetstar and two helicopters around \$20,000. Thus, the total transportation cost for a San Clemente trip would run around \$46,000.

Of course, this doesn't count the \$25 daily expense allotment that is paid to each of the 20 aides who accompany the President to San Clemente. It also doesn't include depreciation on the planes, the constant training flights to keep the crew proficient, and the tremendous cost of moving the President's bodyguards and communications crew around the country.

During the past year, the President has had four vacations at San Clemente, 13 vacations at Key Biscayne and 36 weekends at Camp David. Clearly, this has cost the taxpayers an astronomical amount.

Meanwhile, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) has asked the General Accounting Office to investigate the President's travel. "My constituents in Harlem have to suffer through a long, cold winter," said Rangel. "I think the President should make a few sacrifices, too."

Footnote: When the President is in Florida, the Air Force provides a 24-hour airborne radar patrol over his Key Biscayne retreat. Yet unaccountably, the radar planes are flown to Florida

from McClellan Air Force Base, Calif., though radar planes are available in Florida.

Cover-Up Uncovered — The astonishing story can now be told of how the State Department drafted a lie and asked a U.S. narcotics agent to sign it in an attempt to cover up the involvement of high Panamanian officials in the drug traffic.

The details have been given to us by Rep. John Murphy (D-N.Y.), who learned from the U.S. narcotics agent that Panamanian Foreign Minister Juan Tack and Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos' brother, Moises, were both deep in the narcotics trade.

We learned of the agent's statement and published it — much to the outrage of the State Department, which didn't want to ruffle the Panamanians in the middle of delicate negotiations over the Panama Canal.

Murphy told us a member of the negotiating team called upon him to explain the State Department's attitude.

"The State Department as well as the United States treaty team is well aware of the involvement of members of the Panamanian government (in narcotics)," Murphy quoted the official as telling him.

But, said the official, if the State Department "eliminated dialogue with all Latin American governments that might have high officials involved in the narcotics traffic, very little

dialogue would take place at all."

The State Department, therefore, drafted a letter for the U.S. narcotics agent to sign, denying he had ever said the Panamanian Foreign Minister was involved. The letter was used to pacify the Panamanians, although the agent later said under oath that the letter was a lie forced on him by the State Department.

A high Justice Department official, whom Murphy won't identify, was furious over State's effort to corrupt a narcotics agent and cover up the truth. The official called upon Murphy and urged him to "go after the Panamanian officials."

Despite the cover-up, a high Panamanian airport official had already been arrested in the Canal Zone by U.S. narcotics agents and taken to Texas for trial as a conspirator who tried to smuggle millions of dollars worth of heroin into the United States.

The Foreign Minister himself was fingered as the man who illegally issued a diplomatic passport to a 21-year-old drug courier arrested in New York in connection with a 350-pound drug deal.

Even the staid General Accounting Office reported Panama was unusually corrupt. Torrijos and President Lakas "appeared to be controlling factors in the narcotics traffic," declares a secret GAO report.

© 1973, United Feature Syndicate Inc.