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The Washington Merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — President Ford has no intention of taking Sen. Barry Goldwater's advice that he park Air Force One in the hangar and give full attention to the economy. The President has told subordinates that he'll give top priority to the economic crisis but won't neglect his other presidential duties. He fully expects to continue his foreign travel, with scheduled visits to China, Europe and India.

NIXON'S RELIGION: Friends of Richard Nixon wouldn't be surprised to see him quietly adopt the Catholic faith. He was raised in a devout Quaker home, but, according to his friends, he is impressed with Catholic doctrine and ritual. They say he has had a lot of time to reflect since he left the White House. He is a loner who seldom confides his innermost thoughts to his friends. But he has dropped favorable remarks lately about the Catholics.

TAX AVOIDER: Phantom Billionaire Howard Hughes, one of the world's wealthiest men, has been able to get away without paying federal income taxes year after year. Sources with access to his tax returns tell us that once in the 1960s he was stuck with a \$7 million tax liability. But more often, he paid absolutely no federal income taxes at all. One device he has used to avoid taxes has been diverting money into the nonprofit Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

RECORD SPENDING: President Ford will break all spending records next year. At secret meetings, his budget experts have acknowledged that the deficit is likely to reach the all-time high of \$35 billion in the President's next budget. An anticipated \$112 billion military budget will run up the deficit. Ford has also failed to cut back the budget he inherited from ex-President Nixon. This is now expected to reach \$310 billion, a \$20 billion deficit, by the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

OIL PROFITS: The giant oil companies are supposed to be fierce competitors. But when we cited the low corporate taxes some oil companies pay, Sun Oil rushed to the defense of Gulf and Mobil. Sun Oil distributed a letter declaring that its two rivals had paid 63.2 per cent and 58.4 per cent of their respective taxable incomes to the U.S. Treasury. The letter, referring to our column, added, "One of us just has to be wrong." True. Sun Oil is wrong. Sen. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., has just

released a study based on confidential tax records. Although he used "Company A, B, C" etc., to identify the oil companies, we have broken his code. The Jackson figures prove that for five years, not only Gulf and Mobil but Standard of California, Texaco and Exxon, paid U.S. tax rates ranging from 1.32 to 5.56 per cent.

PRESIDENTIAL GIFTS: Every time an American President takes off for a foreign country, his plane or backup jet

is loaded with personal gifts like a jet-powered Santa Claus sleigh. The White House has kept mum about the gifts, but we have obtained a detailed list. Ex-President Nixon, for example, gave Egypt's President and Mrs. Anwar Sadat six plates with filigree-gilt-bordered color reproductions of Winslow Homer paintings (\$195) and an elaborate silver centerpiece (\$205). Other foreign presidents and pashas have received Bulova Accutron clocks stamped with the presidential seal; Reed and Barton centerpieces; General Aniline "Viewmasters;" music boxes, Boehm porcelain warblers, bunting and other birds; a Franklin Mint collection of state medallions; a porcelain statue of Queen Esther; a Tiffany silver urn; Pickard and Lenox bowls; Steubon containers. The money for these gifts comes from a special \$2.1 million State Department fund set aside for "emergencies."

COLD WINTER: Don't worry about the severe winter that has been predicted. There should be enough heating oil, natural gas, coal and electricity to keep American homes warm. This is the estimate of the Federal Energy Administration, which has been checking quietly into the reserve supplies. There's one hitch: the cost of home heating has gone up and is still rising.

TAX PRIVACY: Although President Ford says he has learned the lesson of Watergate and wants taxpayers' income tax forms to be private, the message has not gotten through to the federal bureaucracy. In a recent letter to Senate Government Operations Chairman Sam Ervin, D-N.C., Commerce Secretary Frederick Dent begs him to block a tax privacy bill introduced by Sen. Lowell Weicker, R-Conn.

RAILROAD LOBBY: The railroad lobby is pulling backstage wires on Capitol Hill to gut a House measure which would put railroad stock offerings under the tough Securities and Exchange Commission. At present, railroad stocks and bonds come under the jurisdiction of the milkop Interstate Commerce Commission. When Penn Central failed, the public was virtually unprotected because the ICC didn't require data on insider trading, cash flow problems, stock dumping and other financial hanky-panky. The bill to put the rails under SEC scrutiny will be taken up by a Senate-House conference, which has come under quiet big-business pressure.

FBI HANDBOOK: The FBI employ handbook is almost as secret as the FBI's famous dossiers. We have had access to a handbook and can report it bans all employees from discussing anything that goes on in the FBI, subject to dismissal, even if it doesn't deal with official FBI business. Employers are barred from doing anything that might "embarrass" the FBI and must report every parking ticket to their bosses.