

The Washington merry-go-round

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With LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON — Richard Nixon has spent almost double the amount Congress allotted for his transition from President to common citizen.

Congress voted a flat \$200,000 to help him adjust to private life. He has already spent at least \$367,000.

We have obtained the expenditures that Nixon has run up in exile at San Clemente, Calif.

During the first three months, \$107,000 was paid out in salaries to 29 aides, including his personal butler, maid, three chauffeurs and a medical corpsman. This doesn't count \$47,000 for the Nixons' living expenses, nor \$2,419 for their miscellaneous travel bills.

Nixon's own travel from Washington to San Clemente cost the taxpayers \$8,440 from the transition fund. But this was only part of the cost; the rest was charged to the White House because he technically remained President during the first part of the flight.

There was a bill for \$3,147, however, for packing and moving Nixon's personal effects to Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington. No charge was made against the transition fund for the shipment to San Clemente, because the crates were carried on scheduled military flights. Nixon's military drivers picked up the crates on El Toro Marine Base, Calif.

To keep Nixon's fleet of government cars full of gas has cost \$2,000. The taxpayers are even paying for magazine subscriptions for the former President.

A bill for \$9,172 was submitted for office supplies, wire service machines and magazine subscriptions.

Not included in the transition cost, of course, is the \$17 million that the federal government has sunk in the Nixon estates in California and Florida.

But even after he gave up the presidency, the government continued to lavish money on his two estates. During the first three months of his retirement, \$52,160 was spent at San Clemente and \$23,540 at Key Biscayne to operate the facilities.

It has cost another \$83,000 to screen, crate and store millions of Nixon papers. There has been no final decision, meanwhile, who will wind up owning his presidential papers and gifts.

Except for the \$17 million that went into the presidential compounds all the expenses listed above were supposed to come out of the \$200,000 transition budget. This is clear from the language of the House Appropriations Committee

report.

Yet on November 9, when these figures were submitted, the former President had already exceeded the budget by a whopping \$167,000. This raises the question of who will be stuck for the overspending.

Since Nixon has been pardoned for the crimes his associates have been convicted of, he is still eligible for an annual \$60,000 pension and \$96,000 staff allowance. The fairest solution might be to deduct the excessive spending from his future appropriations.

Meanwhile, one of the toughest watchdogs in Congress, Rep. Jack Brooks, D-Tex., is keeping a sharp eye on the Nixon spending.

Footnote: the \$367,000 in bills Nixon has run up doesn't include the cost of protecting him, which is not considered a transition expense. It will cost the Secret Service at least \$622,000 a year to protect the Nixons. Another \$126,000 was spent last year on Coast Guard and Secret Service equipment at Key Biscayne.

WASHINGTON WHIRL: As part of the civil defense effort of the 1950s, the federal government stockpiled \$60 million worth of hospital equipment to be used in case of nuclear attack. This hospital equipment, desperately needed both abroad and at home, is still in warehouses going to ruin for lack of care ... Assistant Labor Secretary Jon Stender has sternly restricted his employees to "those trips which are essential in carrying out our program responsibilities." He set an example by taking nine trips to his home state of Washington, three to sunny Florida, one to Puerto Rico and another to Hawaii, all courtesy of the taxpayers. When we tried to reach him for comment, he was — you guess it — off on another junket.

A concerned newspaper in New Jersey, the Elizabeth Daily Journal, has been crusading to help keep six young Vietnamese students from being

shipped out of Los Angeles to Saigon. The paper's hands - across - the - nation appeal began when an editor learned that the six had protested against South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Tyieu and thus faced the likelihood of reprisals if they were forced to go home ... For more than two years, ex-GI Bob Elliot has been trying to get his undesirable discharge reviewed under a law passed to expedite the process. After his written appeals went unanswered, he came to Washington to try in person. But after 19 phone calls, he was still unable to get past a secretary or switchboard operator.