

NY Times AUG 14 1973

Abplanalp Says Friendship With President Is Costly

The Washington Star-News

GRAND CAY, Bahamas, Aug. 13—As his yacht Sea Lion 2 sliced through the emerald Bahamas waters, Robert H. Abplanalp glanced toward a precarious perch on stilts 25 feet above the deck, used as a high-rise lookout chair for deep-sea fishing.

"That's where Nixon likes to ride, up in the 'tuna tower,'" he said. "He scares the hell out of me every time."

Mr. Abplanalp, 51 years old, and a close friend of the President, is a man trying to keep his ease in the eye of a political storm.

Grand Cay, Mr. Abplanalp's private island, has become a frequent weekend Presidential hideaway on foreign soil. With that have come all the trappings of power and protection that follow a President, all the costs, and some of the controversy.

No Calls for Brezhnev

Mr. Abplanalp, already revealed as the secret buyer of most of the land at Mr. Nixon's San Clemente estate in California, is tender toward criticism of the Grand Cay retreat. To avoid that, he said he had insisted on paying for almost all of the security changes—at a personal cost of about \$1-million.

He paid for the helicopter landing areas, for the extra buildings for White House personnel, for road improvements, and for alterations of the gleaming white, two-story home above the bay, he explained.

Although the United States Government has put \$160,000 into special communications equipment on the island,

Mr. Abplanalp said that would be dismantled and carted away after 1976.

"What would I use it for?" he asked. "Who would I call? I am sorry, Mr. Brezhnev, I was trying to reach my bookmaker?"

Mr. Abplanalp is an immigrant's boy from the Bronx, a former machine shop operator who developed the aerosol valve for spray cans and is now worth at least \$30-million.

Mr. Abplanalp has a 99-year lease on a dozen small coral keys at the northernmost part of the island nation off Florida. In the Bahamas, the word key is spelled Cay, but it is still pronounced key!

Mr. Nixon has been hopping down to Mr. Abplanalp's island since 1965, in the days when he was distant from the White House. Now, more than ever, Grand Cay is a haven for him.

Grand Cay, reached only by boat or helicopter, anchors a short necklace of islands that runs north to Walker's Cay, Mr. Abplanalp's fishing resort, where he has opened a club. The island is a former National Aeronautics and Space Administration site that was used for some early United States rocket launchings.

Mr. Abplanalp said, however, that he had bought the lease from a poker-playing widow, not from the Government.

He said she had not told him that the only electric power on the island came from a government generator — and that NASA had already served a 30-day notice to dismantle and remove it.

Mr. Abplanalp provided his own electricity, built an island lodge where mounted game fish line the walls and improved the marina. But he still lives an unpretentious life in which, for example, he took over a lathe the other day to fashion a spindle to fix his generator when the power went out.

On Walker's Cay, Mr. Abplanalp has an experimental hatchery to stock the off-

shore waters with millions of lobsters and stone crabs, replenishing the fishing that brought a nearby Bahamas village its only income until Mr. Abplanalp opened his club.

He's Got a Little List

To counter any criticism of spending United States taxpayers' money on his private retreat, Mr. Abplanalp said, he is putting together an itemized \$1-million list of his expenses for the facilities needed to play host to a President.

Other than the removable communications and security equipment, the only major item added at government cost was an emergency generator on Grand Cay, Mr. Abplanalp said.

He said he had put his own generator, plus its backup and unsightly fuel tanks on neighboring Seahorse Cay and had run an underwater line beneath the narrow channel. But he said the Secret Service had decided this was outside the "security perimeter" and wanted its own emergency power supply on the island.

Mr. Abplanalp thinks the new emergency generator is noisy, and he still does not sound convinced that it was necessary.

He said his own costs on Grand Cay would far outweigh any financial benefit he might get from the Government's rental of the house he bought in Mr. Nixon's Key Biscayne compound in Florida for Secret Service use. It could offset any long-range gains from his San Clemente land, too. But it is the controversy that Mr. Abplanalp finds more irksome than the cost.

Cruising back into the crowded marina at his fishing resort, Mr. Abplanalp said he could see only one good side to all his exposure in the news media. "Walker's Cay is in the black for the first time," he said.