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First Family Baring Foreign

By Maxine Cheshire

VIP

The Ford Administration is preparing to announce a new record-keeping system that would provide for full public disclosure of all gifts to the First Family from heads of state and other foreign officials. But it is still uncertain what policy the White House intends to adopt toward gifts that do not fall under the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966. These are private gifts from U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries who have no connection with foreign governments.

By far the largest number of gifts received by Presidents and their families in the past have come from these unofficial sources.

A White House spokesman confirmed that President Ford has given his "tentative approval" to a procedure that would open up the records of official foreign gifts to public scrutiny. He is planning to announce details later this week, the aide said, after "a few minor points are ironed out with the State Department."

In the meantime, the press office has released a list of "everything" President Ford and his family received from foreign "kings, princes and foreign states" during his first months in office. The list excludes

only those gifts received on his recent trip to Japan and Vladivostok which have not yet been cataloged.

Under the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, all gifts from foreign officials worth more than \$50 are deemed to belong to the U.S. government and are supposed to be turned over "as quickly as possible" to the Chief of Protocol for disposition as public property.

During the Nixon Administration, all records of gifts from foreign officials and others were maintained in the White House Gifts Unit. The Chief of Protocol was given "access" to the records, but they were closed to reporters and anyone else seeking to examine them.

Under the new system proposed by President Ford's advisers, the White House Gifts Unit will continue to maintain original records for use by the correspondence section in writing acknowledgments and thank-you notes and for use by archivists in presidential libraries.

But duplicates, along with photographs, will be maintained in the Protocol Office and will be available for public scrutiny.

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State Gifts to Public View

It is the Chief of Protocol who is charged, under the federal rules and regulations implementing the 1966 gift act, with keeping records of such gifts to either civilian or military personnel in all three branches of government.

He has done so in the past for everyone except for former President Richard M. Nixon and his family.

Nixon's advisers, deciding in 1969 that the First Family was "probably exempt" from the law, decided to keep their records in the White House Gifts Unit. In order to be in compliance, should Congress ever raise the issue, the Nixon administration officials gave the Chief of Protocol "access." That "access" apparently was never used, however.

The Nixons' records, and the gifts themselves, are currently in a legal limbo that may not be resolved for months, or even years.

The Ford administration has impounded all records and gifts left behind in Washington when the Nixons left for San Clemente after his resignation. But many gifts and records are scattered elsewhere, including San Clemente.

Both the records and the gifts are caught up in the legal battle currently being argued in U.S. District Court here over Nixon's contention that all "presidential materials" generated during his presidency belong by tradition to him.

President Ford is making no such claim to his official foreign gifts.

A member of his legal staff, William E. Casselman II, said this week that President Ford intends to "tighten" the rules and regulations pertaining to First Families and "leave no loopholes."

"We want to assure that each gift is strictly accounted for," Casselman said, "and leave no opportunity in the future for such gifts being misused, misplaced, lost, strayed or stolen."

Both the quantity and the quality of gifts received thus far by the Fords seem modest in comparison to the largesse bestowed on the Nixons by foreign leaders.

Of 74 gifts the Fords received prior to his recent travels, 24 were bouquets of flowers.

There are no valuable jewels on the list. The most expensive item of jewelry appears to be a hand-wrought gold scarab pendant, inset with an antique

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