

WXPost

FEB 14 1974

"Mrs. Longworth has kept young, the President told reporters, by not being obsessed by the Washington scene. 'If she had spent all her time reading The Post, she'd have been dead by now.'"

Of Gifts and Criticism

By Jeannette Smyth

Reprinted from yesterday's late editions

President Nixon led a long line of Washington's famous and powerful who helped celebrate the 90th birthday of Mrs. Alice Roosevelt Longworth on Tuesday, then joined another birthday celebration in a downtown restaurant where he had a few sharp words for the press.

Mrs. Longworth has kept young, the President told reporters as he left Trader Vic's restaurant, a few blocks from the White House, by not being obsessed by the Washington scene.

"If she had spent all her time reading The Post, she'd have been dead by now—or at least, for that matter."

"But Mrs. Longworth sees the world and brings people in from all over," the President continued, "and as a result she stays young by not being obsessed by miserable political things all of us unfortunately think about in Washington, instead of the great things which will affect the future of the world—which The Post unfortunately seldom writes about in a responsible way."

Trying to ascend the escalator to street level, Mr. Nixon called over his shoulder, "Quote that exactly as I said it."

The President and Mrs. Nixon said they made a last minute decision Tuesday night to join their daughter and son-in-law, Julie and David Eisenhower, in celebrating the 58th birthday of Mr. Nixon's personal physician, Dr. Walter Tkach, with dinner at the Polynesian-style restaurant.

It was the second time in five days the First Family visited the restaurant. Last Friday night Mr. Nixon presided over a Trader Vic's party attended by the House and Senate minority leaders and Vice President Gerald Ford.

Mrs. Nixon said that the young Eisenhowers originally had planned the party

for Dr. Tkach, and his wife, the former Cheryl Gailliard, for last Saturday night, Tkach's actual birthdate, but Tkach was ill.

As Mr. Nixon table-hopped his way toward the exit after dinner, patrons in the half-filled restaurant applauded him. He stopped by the table of Susan Ford, the teen-aged daughter of Vice President Gerald Ford. Miss Ford and her Holton Arms School roommate were having dinner with a group of young people.

The President responded with good humor to queries about his annual physical check-up scheduled for Wednesday morning after several delays.

He said, "They jab you with needles and take your blood pressure" but "I've been doing it for 60 years, so it's no excuse for not doing the job."

One diner asked the President how he was feeling. Mr. Nixon replied that his older brother and his mother had died of diseases, but, he added jokingly, "I'll never die!"

Tkach's was the third birthday Mr. Nixon celebrated on Tuesday—the first, Lincoln's, with a speech at the Lincoln Memorial, and the second, Alice Roosevelt Longworth's with a visit to Mrs. Longworth's Massachusetts Avenue home.

The Nixons and the young Eisenhowers headed up a guest list of 175 friends Mrs. Longworth has collected over her decades as a Washington resident. Mrs. Art Buchwald, wife of the columnist, brought a large Raggedy Ann doll as a present, with a note that said "even naughty girls deserve a doll on their birthday."

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger brought no gift, but invited Mrs. Longworth to lunch to see the abstract paintings in his office.

President Nixon brought a music box with the Presidential Seal that plays

Strauss waltzes; Mrs. Nixon brought two jars of Iranian caviar in a white paper bag.

Mrs. Longworth, wearing a long black dress with huge tigers printed on it, greeted the Nixons at the head of the stairs leading to her living room. Mr. Nixon told her the caviar had been "given to Mrs. Nixon by the Iranian ambassador, so they must be the best. We know you like to eat it with a spoon."

The First Family stayed for an hour. The President wound up sitting on the sofa, talking to Mrs. Longworth and her half-sister, Ethel Roosevelt Derby, 81.

"Everybody remarked on how well the President looked," said Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley on his departure.

Also among Mrs. Longworth's well-wishers were Margaret Truman Daniel, daughter of the late President Harry S. Truman; Sen. and Mrs. Charles Percy (R-Ill.), Sen. and Mrs. Hugh Scott (R-Pa.), Sen. and Mrs. William Scott (R-Va.), former ambassadors Averell Harriman and Louise Gore, Secretary of Commerce Frederick B. Dent, Mayor and Mrs. Walter E. Washington, Mrs. Robert Low Bacon, the grande dame of Republican hostesses, former vice-presidential candidate Sargent Shriver and his wife, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Italian Ambassador and Mrs. Egidio Ortona, and former Sen. and Mrs. John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky.

Mrs. Longworth had three birthday cakes—one with "Happy Birthday To Me" written on it, and two more in the shape of the numerals nine and zero. There were 10 candles on the large, round cake "To Me," and someone pointed out that the 10th "was to be good on."

"Not a chance," quipped another guest.