

# Holding Our Leaders to the Constitution

No other nation has been as successful as the United States in maintaining a free society. The bulwark of American freedom is the Constitution, which was carefully written to protect the people from the government.

But President Nixon and the people he brought into the White House, in pursuit of their political goals, have exceeded the limits of the law. They have claimed the right to violate fundamental freedoms.

The revelations have rocked the nation, confused the populace and divided the electorate. The Founding Fathers believed that the people of this country had both the strength of purpose and the nobility of spirit to make government both responsive and responsible.

It falls upon the people, therefore, to end the abuses of power that threaten their freedom. For power corrupts not only those who abuse it but whole nations as well when they tolerate the abuse.

As their guide, the people must turn to the Constitution, which is the source of their freedom. They must hold their elected leaders strictly to the provisions of the Constitution. For if small violations are tolerated, these become precedents for great violations.

We called attention last April, for example, to the Constitutional restrictions on the President's pay. He is entitled to compensation for his services, according to the Constitution, but he "shall not receive . . . any other emolument from the United States."

Our Constitutional footnote spurred the House Judiciary Committee into taking a closer look at President Nixon's home improvements. Two staff members, James Reum and Thomas Payne, interviewed several California

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contractors about their work on the presidential compound.

They have confirmed our reports, going back to Oct. 3, 1972, that the President has spent the taxpayers' money to enhance his private property. He finally accepted the finding of the Internal Revenue Service that nearly \$100,000 worth of government-paid home improvements should be declared as personal income.

Thus by official IRS ruling which the President doesn't contest, he has received emoluments from the United States in addition to his regular salary. This would appear to violate the Constitution.

We have also questioned whether government officials, who accept extravagant vacations at the expense of foreign governments, have trespassed on the Constitution. For a Constitutional caveat clearly outlaws any "emolument . . . of any kind whatever from any King, Prince, or foreign state."

We reported Sen. Vance Hartke (D-Ind.), his wife, his daughter and two aides whined through five nations in three weeks. He soaked the American taxpayers for his own travel bills and drew the legal limit of \$75 per day in U.S. counterpart funds. But virtually all his other expenses were covered by his foreign hosts. From Iran to Ceylon,

the governments picked up his local hotel and travel bills.

Capitol Hill's premier junketeer, Rep. Richard Hanna (D-Calif.) regularly explores the exotic corners of the globe. He gallivanted around the Far East last January, he admitted to us, "as a guest of the Pertamina Oil Company," which happens to be Indonesia's national oil firm.

Last April, a dozen congressional staff members flew to Taiwan for a week's vacation financed by the Chiang Kaishek government. South Vietnam has also invited congressional employees on all-expenses-paid trips. Eight staff members traveled free to Saigon recently, for example, to view "present realities" in Southeast Asia.

At the request of Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.), the House Ethics Committee has now put out an "advisory opinion" on the subject of traveling at the expense of foreign governments. An aide to Kemp had been offered a free trip, and the congressman wanted to check on its legality.

The House Ethics Committee rarely issues an opinion, much less one that is candid and clear. But this time, the committee was quite succinct: "Acceptance of travel or living expenses in specie, or in kind by a Member or employee of the House of Representatives from any foreign Govern-

ment, official or representative thereof is . . . prohibited."

The 1966 Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act, which seeks to implement the Constitutional restriction, specifically prohibits government officials from accepting valuable gifts from foreign governments. The gifts are supposed to be turned into the State Department.

We reported last Feb. 15 that the First Family's jeweler kept thick books of the Nixon jewelry, "listing the gems of Tricia and Rose Mary Woods, the President's loyal secretary, and a smaller book for Julie."

Washington Post columnist Maxine Cheshire, digging deeper, reported that Pat Nixon had retained custody of \$52,000 worth of jewelry presented by the Saudi Arabian royal family.

Subsequently, other top officials, including former Vice President Spiro Agnew, former Secretary of State William Rogers, Sens. Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.) and J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) have hastily submitted jewelry and other valuable items to the State Department for cataloging.

Deputy Comptroller General Robert Keller, who drafted the legal opinion on foreign travel, told us that although the Constitution and the gifts law prohibit foreign emoluments, no penalties exist for enforcing the prohibition.

The Independence Day weekend is an appropriate time to review and revitalize our Constitutional heritage. The Constitution, it seems to us, should be inviolate. Its provisions should be enforced. Its doctrine of freedom should be held sacred.

Under the Constitution, American government must be reformed and redefined, not by revolution but by restoration.