

PEOPLE OF THE WEEK®

## PORTRAIT OF "BEBE" REBOZO— NIXON FAMILY'S CLOSEST FRIEND

What do you know about President Nixon's frequent companion and good friend—Charles Gregory Rebozo?

If the answer is "Not much," you are one of a multitude. Still, Mr. Rebozo—called "Bebe" by many, "Beeb" by the First Family—probably spends more leisure hours with the President of the United States than any other individual outside his immediate family.

Who is Mr. Rebozo? What is he to the President? How can he afford to pull up his Florida stakes and travel with the Nixons to the West Coast or wherever? Is he a policy-shaping adviser reminiscent of Colonel House of the Woodrow Wilson era? Or is he just a nonpolitical friend to a man who—outwardly, at least—has few close friendships?

**The story.** To clear up what seems to be a mystery to millions of Americans, here is the story of Mr. Rebozo and the role he plays in the life of the President of the United States—

The year was 1951. Richard M. Nixon had recently won a U. S. Senate seat. Nursing a cold, he was urged by Democrat George A. Smathers—with whom he had entered the U. S. House in 1947—to head for the sun of Florida.

Floridian Smathers, also a new Senator and a Rebozo friend since the fourth grade, arranged for Mr. Nixon to stay at the home of Mr. Rebozo, a first-generation Cuban American who had been divorced in 1950.

The Nixon-Rebozo friendship began to grow almost immediately.

As Vice President from 1953 through 1960, Mr. Nixon saw his wealthy friend in Florida on numerous occasions.

Mr. Rebozo was the only "outsider" with the Nixons that 1960 election night when Mr. Nixon lost the presidential race to John F. Kennedy.

When Richard Nixon ran for Governor of California in 1962, acquaintances say it was with "some financial sacrifice" that Mr. Rebozo moved from Florida to the West Coast to help his friend during the campaign. He was there when the defeated candidate told newsmen:

"You won't have Nixon to kick around any more."

In 1965, Mr. Rebozo was with the Nixons when they marked their silver wedding anniversary in Mexico; in 1966, he went around the world with the future President; and, in 1967, the two men were together in South America.

When Mr. Nixon decided to make a



Mr. Rebozo, a friend of Mr. Nixon's since 1951, is often a guest at White House and joins the Nixon family on vacations in Florida, California and elsewhere.

second attempt for the Presidency in 1968, Mr. Rebozo was against the idea. Says one source:

"Bebe was afraid of what the impact of another major defeat would have on his friend."

Today Mr. Rebozo, 58—the same age as Mr. Nixon—is a frequent guest at the White House and at the Nixon family's vacation spots. He is with the Nixons on most special occasions.

Mrs. Nixon has told close friends that the President is "comfortable with Beeb." She is said to have a "sisterlike affection" for him, and the Nixon daughters, Julie and Tricia, look upon him as a "favorite uncle." Mr. Nixon has described him as "a great guy."

**"Almost a ritual."** This affection is demonstrated each time the Nixons go to Key Biscayne, Fla., where Mr. Rebozo owns a home in a five-house complex, part of which serves as the winter White House. Says one who has witnessed the scene on various occasions:

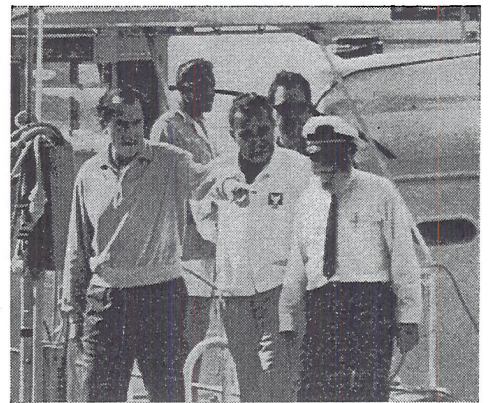
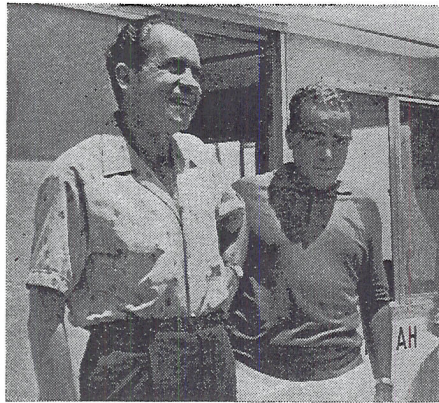
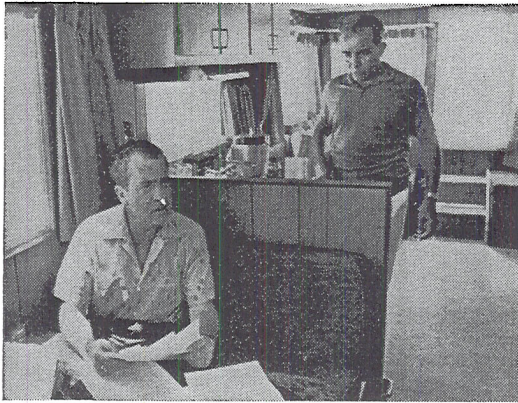
"It's almost a ritual. Bebe is standing there smiling. The helicopter lands; the President jumps out and shakes his hand. Mrs. Nixon and the Nixon girls throw their arms around Bebe."

When the President goes to his home in San Clemente, Calif., Mr. Rebozo stays at a nearby hotel because guest facilities at the Nixon residence are limited. The two friends walk on the beach together, and Mr. Rebozo—called "a good wheel man" by a Secret Service man—drives Mr. Nixon around the area.

Mr. Rebozo is a frequent guest at Camp David, a Government-owned retreat in Maryland; he goes with Mr. Nixon to the Bahamas; he is host to the President on Florida cruises aboard his houseboat; he is available to bowl, golf, swim or dine with the Nixons.

**Invited guest.** Mr. Rebozo never shows up unless he is invited. When the President gets in touch with him, however, he takes a commercial jet to join the Nixons. On the presidential plane, Mr. Rebozo sometimes dons a jacket decorated with the presidential seal. It is similar to jackets staff members wear. Mr. Rebozo chats with others while Mr. Nixon works. An official says:

"When the President wants to relax, he will say, 'Where is Beeb?'—and Rebozo is called. He never volunteers advice to President Nixon. If the President wants a conversation, Rebozo can



—Wide World Photos

The President on Mr. Rebozo's houseboat. Mr. Nixon likes the water, as did Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy.



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The Floridian says of the Nixons: "I have always been made to feel like a part of their entire family." Mr. Rebozo owns a home near theirs at Key Biscayne.

carry it; he is entertaining and diverting. But sometimes Mr. Nixon appreciates quiet, and Bebe can be awfully quiet."

Those close to the two men report that conversations center on real estate, boats, books, sports, and friends in the sports and entertainment worlds.

White House aides say Mr. Rebozo will "open up" on various subjects if President Nixon wants "man-in-the-street reactions," but will do so only when he is asked and when the two are alone. Says a staff man: "Mr. Rebozo is very scrupulous in avoiding any input into official conversations."

The Floridian is also protective of his friendship. He refuses calls from anyone suspected of wanting to use him as a contact for a presidential favor. He generally shuns newsmen.

However, Mr. Rebozo made this comment to "U. S. News & World Report" about his friendship with the Nixons:

"I have always been made to feel like a part of their entire family. The First Lady and the girls have always treated me as though I were a member of the family.

"Naturally, the justification for my high regard for the President should be

apparent to everyone by now. It is my feeling that, if he were given credit for just a fraction of his accomplishments, he would already be heralded as one of the all-time great Presidents. I am sure history will recognize him accordingly."

Comments a Nixon associate: "Mr. Rebozo's main role is to take some of the pressure off the President. Bebe is the kind of friend all of us want and need—a person who likes us for ourselves, and is not with us to use us."

**Self-made wealth.** Mr. Rebozo's travels with Mr. Nixon are expensive for him, but he apparently can afford them. His worth is reported at between 1 and 5 million dollars.

The Rebozo wealth is self-made. Born in Tampa, Fla., "Bebe" Rebozo was the youngest of nine children whose parents had come from Cuba. After graduating from high school, young Rebozo was an airline steward, a chauffeur, a gas-station owner, and an investor in a tire-recapping business. In World War II, he was a navigator on contract flights for the Army's Air Transport Command.

Real estate, however, was the key to his success. He was only in the sixth grade when he invested \$25 in a lot—

and lost his money. Undiscouraged, he went on to buy more property. Says a friend: "He purchased raw land at \$2 and \$3 an acre. We all felt he was mad, but he could see the potential of the Florida land boom and we couldn't."

The postwar housing boom made him wealthy. Today, Mr. Rebozo owns apartments and land around Miami and on several Florida keys. He also owns a title-insurance firm, is chairman and president of the Key Biscayne State Bank, and has interests in a shopping center and self-service laundries.

**Investment adviser.** According to friends, it was on Mr. Rebozo's advice that Mr. Nixon invested in some Florida real estate and doubled his money in six years.

It was not until late 1968 that Mr. Rebozo changed his registration from Democrat to Republican. He is described as a "moderate conservative" whose political thinking is very close to President Nixon's.

Mr. Rebozo is said to be dedicated to avoiding any situation that might embarrass the President.

The Floridian—who has not remarried—has indicated to friends that he is careful about his dates because he wants to prevent any idle gossip that might reflect on the Nixon family.

One woman who has been in Mr. Rebozo's company calls him a "suave man-about-town, with a lot of old-world charm, and a fun guy." Another says that "Bebe" enjoys cooking Cuban dinners for his dates.

Friends say Mr. Rebozo—who likes piloting planes as well as boating—is satisfied with staying in the background and enjoying life in Key Biscayne, where he has headed the yacht club, the Kiwanis Club and the Chamber of Commerce.

An associate sums up Mr. Rebozo's friendship with Mr. Nixon this way:

"Bebe has everything he wants and will never make a demand on the President. Mr. Nixon knows this. He can let his hair down, relax, say what he wants, and be sure that it will never end up in a book."