

# THE CAPITAL



## Running for the House

By Russell Baker  
New York Times

### Washington

"I HAD ALWAYS thought it would be an awful thing to be President of the United States," writes a man from Iowa, "but I am having second thoughts since reading about the household improvements President Nixon has had installed in his California and Florida houses. In fact, I am now thinking seriously about announcing my candidacy for President, since I have read somewhere that the Secret Service takes a protective interest even in mere candidates.

"As I understand it, the \$1 million or more in public money spent to improve the President's houses was laid on by the Secret Service to make his houses more secure. My own house is a security agent's nightmare. I estimate it would take \$250,000 to put it in shape for simple basic security — the kind I suppose they give to mere candidates.

"I was particularly fetched when I read about the new wiring system the Secret Service had installed in San Clemente to eliminate a fire hazard, as well as the expensive pruning job they had done to make sure no tree limbs would fall on the President if he took a walk.

"I don't know about my wiring, but there is a fierce piece of termite damage under my dining room floor, or maybe it was carpenter ants that did it. House-eating bugs are all the same to me. In any case, I suppose the Secret Service has an expert who can tell the difference.

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"WHAT GOT ME seriously interested in this was the fact which I read way back on Page 73 of some newspaper behind all that Watergate blather. The item said the improvements made for security cost more than the purchase price of both the President's houses.

"My first thought on that was, 'Well, here's a howdy-do! If this sort of thing is going to keep up, maybe we ought to make presidential candidates in the future tell us how much we're going to have to pay to make their houses secure if they get elected.'

"I mean, would all those young idealists have been so eager to vote for McGovern last time if they had known it was going to cost them, say, \$5 million to make his private houses secure?

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"THERE IS a leak in my cellar that would take about \$103,000 to stop, I suspect. I've never dared to get an estimate, because I only paid \$30,000 for the whole house. If I was President, I imagine, the Secret Service would have to haul the whole old cellar away and put in a new aluminum one so I could go down there without risk of catching the croup.

"I've got a back door that my sons and most of his friends could get in and out of in the middle of the night regardless of locks — they're adolescents, and you know what that means. Cans of beer going up those back steps when they think I'm sleeping the sleep of the decrepit. I'll bet the Secret Service could give a \$5,000 or \$10,000 lock for that door that not even an 18-year-old boy could figure out. You know how dangerous it can be for a President to have beer cans going up the back steps at midnight.

"Once I got the old house fixed up by Uncle Sam I might even make a fair imitation of a President. I'd love to make one of those pious speeches laying it on the idlers and loafers who sit around asking what the government can do for them instead of asking what they can do for themselves."

**Arthur Hoppe is on vacation**