

The Presidential Style of Life

Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.) and his government operations subcommittee are taking the right approach to the problem of excessive public outlays for the care and comfort of the President. It would have been all too easy for the subcommittee simply to carp about particular expenditures, or to bog down in squabbles over how much was spent on the security of previous chief executives, or to worry whether certain new windows and gazebos enhanced the value of Mr. Nixon's estates. Instead, Representative Brooks and his colleagues intend to offer legislation to inject real accountability into the whole process of providing security and support for the President.

The issue is much broader than the lawns of San Clemente or the beaches of Key Biscayne. The \$10 million or more that has been poured into refurbishing those two compounds is only a fraction of the total spent to maintain the chief executive's establishment. In the October issue of *Fortune*, Dan Cordtz tots up the perquisites which comprise "the monarchical style of life to which U.S. Presidents have become accustomed." He concludes that the official White House budget of under \$13 million "ludicrously understates" the actual cost of the White House and its staff, the presidential courtiers, Camp David, entertainment, the presidential fleet of jetliners and helicopters, Mr. Nixon's array of offices, and the protection and communications required wherever the President may be. According to one budget analyst cited by Mr. Cordtz, the "true cost of running the presidency could be as high as \$100 million a year,"

with most of the monies buried in the accounts of other federal agencies.

What makes all this so unseemly is the absence of restraint. Public money is spent too casually on little frills—a shuffleboard court of black-and-white terrazzo tile instead of concrete, a fence of redwood instead of wire and mesh. Presidential aides and documents are whisked about the country by government jet instead of less costly commercial flights. Expenditures have been ordered in Mr. Nixon's behalf by friends such as Herbert Kalmbach, with the bills sent to GSA. It adds up to a style devoid of modesty, proportion or thrift.

Congress has aided and abetted such extravagance by granting Presidents virtually unlimited access to public funds for the upkeep of their offices and establishments. Representative Brooks has outlined some reforms which the Congress should now enact. His list includes full disclosure of all spending for presidential security and support, the adoption of "orderly operating and accounting procedures" by the Secret Service and GSA, and legislation to prohibit outside parties from ordering items for the chief executive and billing the government. The congressman is interested as well in setting limits on the amounts which may be spent on the private property of Presidents. But the most important item on his agenda is also the one that cannot be legislated—a requirement that the President himself "show more responsibility" in his demands on federal agencies and public funds. The point of such reforms is not primarily to save money or tidy up the books, but to restore to the conduct of the presidency a sense of proportion and propriety which has been lost along the way.