

GAO Frowns On Work at Nixon Homes

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Washington

Government auditors suggested yesterday that President Nixon should have paid personally for some of the federally financed work at his California and Florida homes.

The General Accounting Office, in a 99-page report, criticized the "casual attitude" shown by federal officials and agencies in ordering the work.

It disclosed that Mr. Nixon himself, his White House aides, his close friend C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, his lawyer and his architect were involved in ordering or approving many of the projects that presidential spokesmen said previously were done at Secret Service

Back Page Col. 2

From Page 1

request.

The agency, a watchdog over federal spending, said Congress should consider limiting the number of private presidential residences at which permanent Secret Service protective facilities are installed.

And it suggested that the government supply the Vice President with a residence in Washington to cut the costs of installing security devices in their private homes.

The GAO audit centered on \$1.4 million it said was spent by the Secret Service and General Services Administration at Mr. Nixon's Key Biscayne and San Clemente homes.

No specific dollar total was provided for work the auditors suggested Mr. Nixon should have paid for personally. Most involved landscape maintenance, installation of a new furnace, installation of new sewer lines and correction of a defective fireplace — and were considerably less costly than major security installations

such as bullet-proof glass.

In reviewing \$886,900 in such major security projects as walls and fences, lighting, command posts and bullet-proof glass, the agency said "on balance these facilities do not provide significant benefits to the President apart from protection."

But the report also cited other projects that it said Mr. Nixon should have paid for himself or should have shared in the cost, including:

Landscape maintenance — At one time, it said the government paid for five full-time landscape maintenance men at San Clemente and one full-time worker at Key Biscayne. The President now pays for the bulk of the landscape costs.

"The problem of distinguishing between landscape maintenance which should be assumed by the government and that which should be assumed by the President defies any clear solution," the report concluded.

"However, it appears that the government did some landscape maintenance at both residences which should have been done at the President's expense."

Property Survey — It said the General Services Administration paid \$5500 for boundary and structural surveys on the San Clemente property which were ordered by Mr. Nixon's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach.

The surveys were made in connection with Mr. Nixon's

acquisition of the property, it said, and "we think it was inappropriate for the government to assume the costs."

New furnace — Before Mr. Nixon bought his Spanish-style San Clemente home, the report shows the Secret Service decided "a major fire hazard" was posed by its heating system. But it said it also found that Mr. Nixon's architect wanted to replace the system "to carry out a general reconditioning of the residence."

"Because the Secret Service insisted on an electric system, the \$13,500 cost was borne by the government," the report said as it questioned "whether the government should pay the entire cost of the new system when the President intended to install one anyway."

Sewer lines — The government paid \$3800 of the \$9800 cost of installing new sewer lines at the San Clemente home after then - Presidential aide John Ehrlichman intervened with the GSA, contending the work was necessary because of official visitors.

The auditors said, however, that the "sewer was installed to replace the septic tank system and to drain the swimming pool On this basis we believe the government should not have shared the cost."

Other items — The report also questioned whether the government should have paid the full cost for a \$400 exhaust fan to correct a "smoking fireplace" and suggested

that such projects as erection of a beach cabana and a bullet-proof screen alongside the swimming pool lent "non-protective benefits" to the President.

Nowhere in the report did the GAO suggest that Mr. Nixon now be billed for any work already paid for by the government.

The auditors reported Mr. Nixon's personal involvement in some of the projects. For example, it said he personally rejected architectural plans for a Secret Service command post at his Key Biscayne home, saying "he would not have such a building on his property and that he wanted the command post to be in the shape of a lighthouse."

The study, which was launched last May in response to requests from members of Congress, also sought to review spending at the homes of past presidents but in most cases said firm figures were unavailable.

It did cite GSA expenditures of \$328,000 at former President Lyndon B. Johnson's Texas ranch and said other amounts were spent by the Secret Service and by the military.

Cost figures for Presidents Kennedy, Eisenhower, Truman and Roosevelt "were generally unavailable," it said, "because of the lapse of time and because assistance was often provided to the Secret Service by other federal agencies on an informal basis."

Associated Press