

I'm Air Force One, Fly Me

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If three cars were added, an extra engine would be required to pull the train and that would mean additional fuel, and expense . . . Ahead of every presidential train goes a pilot train to check the rails and to make certain no bomb is on the tracks. [Presidential Press Secretary] Warren said there would not have to be a pilot train for the President to go to Florida. Instead of a pilot train, Warren said, the regular passenger train would be broken up into two sections and the advance section would serve as the pilot train.

AS YOU WILL immediately observe from the above fragment of a recent dispatch from our man at the White House, Carroll Kilpatrick, it would not be a simple matter for President Nixon to make his way by railroad train to Key Biscayne for the holidays—nor a particularly restful journey for those passengers in the pilot train whose designated mission would be to “check the rails and to make certain no bomb is on the tracks.” Sacrifice, to be sure, is the order of the day, and the President’s purpose in even considering this alternative to fuel-costly flying is commendable. But, frankly, we think there are better ways for him to set an example for the American traveler and to give symbolic reinforcement to the need to conserve precious energy resources. In short, we think no one will or should begrudge him the use of Air Force One (or “The Spirit of ’76,” as Mr. Nixon has renamed the presidential plane) with all the built-in and time-tested security arrangements it provides, for a holiday visit to his Florida home.

We say this in full knowledge that Mr. Nixon’s use of an airplane on this occasion may waste a little fuel and appear to be inconsistent with his administration’s demand for drastic curtailment of unessential travel. But the logistical nightmare involved in organizing the train trip, not to mention the heightened security risks, would seem to amount to one of those penny-wise-pound-

foolish ventures—rather akin to Lyndon Johnson’s “economizing” by turning off White House light bulbs in 1964. Make no mistake, there is plenty the President could have done and still can do by way of example. He could have foregone that frantic, three-day swing around the Southland for the transparently political purposes of Operation Candor, right after having summoned us all to sacrifice for the sake of fuel conservation. After all, there is very little that the President can say to restore public support and confidence that cannot be said from his White House office. And doubtless there are other fuel economies the President could practice to help show the way.

But these are not to be confused with contrivances such as slowing down his plane, denying his pilot the normal test flights to check out the performance of the presidential jet, or putting government officials to work arranging for an enormously complicated and expensive journey by commercial train—all of which tend to produce small, if any, savings in fuel while adding needlessly to the hazards of any travel Mr. Nixon undertakes. We think the President is entitled to a vacation in Florida and to the use of the soundest, surest way of getting there and back. And if this means Air Force One, we cannot see how anyone could quarrel with that.

