

G.A.O. Critical of Outlays On Nixon's Private Homes

By PHILIP SHABECOFF

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—The General Accounting Office, reporting on its review of Federal spending on President Nixon's private residences, called today for Congressional action to provide closer control over and greater public disclosure of such expenditures in the future.

The agency also asked Congress to consider limiting the number of President's private residences protected at public expense.

The report put the total spending by the General Services Administration at the President's private residences at Key Biscayne, Fla., and San Clemente, Calif., at \$1.4-million. It said that most of the amount was in fact spent for protection of the President.

However, the G.A.O., Congress's "watchdog agency," also found that some of the expenditures by the Government were questionable and perhaps should have been paid by the President.

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The \$1.4-million includes only expenditures on the house and grounds at the two estates. It does not include expenditures on the office complex adjoining San Clemente, on military communications support at the two residences or at Grand Cay Is-

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land, the home of Mr. Nixon's friend Robert H. Abplanalp. Those items bring the total Federal spending on private property in the name of Presidential security and support to more than \$10-million.

The audit found that all of the spending by the Secret Service on security devices, and most of the spending by the General Services Administration on fences, lighting, command posts and guardhouses did serve protective purposes.

However, it also found that some of the spending served "nonprotective functions," and

that "architectural considerations" stipulated by the President's personal representatives added substantially to the cost of providing protection in a number of cases.

The report questioned, for example, whether the Government should have picked up the entire cost of a \$13,500 heating system, since the President had intended to install a new system anyway.

It said that while a hedge and fence system at the Key Biscayne property served a protective function, the design for the fence ordered by the President's representative, with specially cast ornamentations to make it look like the White House fence, brought the total cost to \$71,000—more expensive than the original design, although how much more the G.A.O. did not say.

The agency concluded that the Government should not have shared the cost of a new sewer system at San Clemente which, it found, was installed to replace a septic tank and drain a swimming pool.

It said that a 30-yard-long bulletproof glass screen costing \$13,000 installed next to the swimming pool, while it did provide protection from attack from the ocean, also could act as a window screen to shield the President from Pacific Ocean breezes.

The report also found it "inappropriate" for the Government to assume the cost of boundary and structural surveys used by the Secret Service. Since the survey had already been ordered by the President's personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach, in connection with the purchase of the property, the Government could have obtained copies of the survey prepared for the President without additional cost, the Federal agency.

These are only some of the questions raised by the agency regarding the propriety of specific expenditures at the two residences.

In discussing the dangers of a "casual attitude" in authorizing work paid for from the public purse, the G.A.O. said that although the law required the director of the Secret Service to request assistance from

other Government agencies to protect the President, there had been no letter from the director asking work by the G.S.A. on the two residences.

It also said that vague verbal requests by the Secret Service invited the G.S.A. to go beyond simple needs of security. It specifically mentioned a meeting between John D. Ehrlichman, then counsel to the President, with the administrator of the G.S.A. on the grounds in San Clemente as "a case in point" of how the G.S.A. could be induced to go further than simple security.

The G.A.O. report did not present much material going beyond previous disclosures, including those by the House Government Activities Subcommittee, on Federal spending on President Nixon's private homes. Nor did it question the need for Government spending on Presidential security.

It did, however, find substantial fault with the administration of Government funds in this regard. To guard against possible misuse of Government funds in the future, it made the following recommendations:

¶ Appropriations for expenditures at private residences should be made only to the Secret Service.

¶ Expenditures at such homes should be authorized only by the director or deputy director of the Service.

¶ The Service should make an annual public report to Congress describing such expenditures in detail.

¶ This report should be subject to an annual audit by the G.A.O., which would have access to all relevant documents.

Finally, the G.A.O. recommended considering a limit on the number of Presidential homes that the public would spend money on and establishing a Government-owned home in Washington for the Vice President to reduce the cost of providing protective facilities for successive holders of that office.

The G.A.O. is an agency, responsible to Congress, that conducts audits and investigations at the request of individual Congressmen or Congressional committees or on its own initiative. It operates with a large staff of auditors and investigators, and its chief, the Controller General of the United States, is appointed for a long term which, in theory, removes him from partisan politics.

Reports by the G.A.O. are often used as the basis of legislation by Congress or remedial action by the executive branch.

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