

What It Costs to Fly Nixon Around



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PRESIDENT NIXON'S flights to his vacation retreats have cost the taxpayers more money and have burned more fuel than the White House has told the public.

It takes a jet fleet to move the President when he gets the notion to spend a few days at the shore. He usually flies in regal splendor in Air Force One, which he calls the "Spirit of '76," accompanied by an identical Boeing 707 back-up plane and a Lockheed Jetstar.

In addition, two Sikorsky helicopters follow behind in case the President should want to hop around during his stay at shore. The round-trip to San Clemente takes 36 hours for the helicopters and uses up 10,800 gallons of fuel. Flying back and forth to Key Biscayne, the two choppers spend 15 hours in the air and drink up 4800 gallons.

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A TYPICAL round-trip to San Clemente consumes a fantastic 71,000 gallons of fuel. For the Key Biscayne trip, the figure is 30,000 gallons. Three helicopters, with a total fuel consumption of 450 gallons, usually escort the President to Camp David and back.

Neither the White House nor the Air Force would tell us how much it costs the taxpayers to operate the presidential aircraft. However, the government charged the Republican Party \$1300 an hour for the use of the presidential jet during the 1972 campaign. It costs slightly less to fly Jetstars, still less for helicopters.

At the \$1300-an-hour rate, it would cost

the taxpayers \$26,000 to send the two presidential jets to San Clemente and back. Our sources estimate the operating costs for the Jetstar and two helicopters around \$20,000. Thus, the total transportation cost for a San Clemente trip would run around \$46,000.

Of course, this doesn't count the \$25 daily expense allotment that is paid to each of the 20 aides who accompany the President to San Clemente. It also doesn't include depreciation on the planes, the constant training flights to keep the crew proficient, and the tremendous cost of moving the President's bodyguards and communications crew around the country.

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DURING the past year, the President has had four vacations at San Clemente, 13 vacations at Key Biscayne and 36 weekends at Camp David. Clearly, this has cost the taxpayers an astronomical amount.

A White House spokesman told us the President hasn't changed his "travel policy." But because of the fuel shortage, the spokesman said, Mr. Nixon took no trips in December. This could be an "indication," said the spokesman, of the President's intentions for 1974.

Footnote: When the President is in Florida, the Air Force provides a 24-hour-airborne radar patrol over his Key Biscayne retreat. Yet unaccountably, the radar planes are flown to Florida from McClellan Air Force Base, California, though radar planes are available in Florida.