

# commentary

from other pens...

## Presidential yachts now mostly history

Franklin Roosevelt installed a hand-operated elevator. Lyndon Johnson had it converted into a bar. Winston Churchill found the deck chairs uncomfortable. John F. Kennedy celebrated his last birthday in the salon.

After 77 years afloat, the yacht Sequoia has stories to tell, even though it hasn't been a presidential cruiser since Jimmy Carter sold it in 1977 as an unwanted symbol of the imperial presidency.

According to legend, the fish deck, an isolated perch at the stern of the boat, was one of the few places where Richard Nixon felt comfortable.

Nixon cruised on the Sequoia 88 times during his presidency, discussed Vietnam policy with Henry Kissinger there, negotiated a Cold War arms agreement with Leonid Brezhnev on its top deck and, as Watergate grew to gigantic proportions, decided he must resign his presidency.

There is a story, says Gary Silversmith, the current owner of the Sequoia, that on one of his last visits, when a steward poured his customary second scotch, Nixon unexpectedly asked him to leave the bottle. "If the president wants you to leave the bottle, you leave the bottle," the captain responded when the steward reported what had happened.

Silversmith, 46, a lawyer and collector of presidential memorabilia, bought Sequoia for a reported \$1.9 million. He has berthed the boat on the Washington waterfront and charters it for \$10,000 a cruise. He says the yacht has been used for political fund-raisers for both Republican and Democratic candidates and has paid its own expenses.

On a recent tour the Sequoia was flooded with sunlight, its teak and mahogany cabins hung with framed photographs of presidents and their guests, its wheelhouse fitted with a brass plaque listing the Navy officers who served as skipper from 1933 to 1977.

Silversmith says the vessel, a designated national historic site, is certainly the most important piece of presidential history in private hands.

Built in 1925, the 104-foot, 150-ton Sequoia has a presidential suite, captain's quarters and two guest cabins. President Kennedy had a slot built into the transom above the door to his quarters so he could receive official papers while preserving his privacy. Silversmith said it was taken out of naval service to avoid the rule of no alcohol aboard a Navy ship.

There's some irony there because the Sequoia first saw government service as part of the effort to enforce prohibition.

The yacht was recruited for presidential service by Herbert Hoover, who played medicine ball on its top deck and used it for a Florida vacation. A photograph of the yacht is the centerpiece of his 1932 White House Christmas card.

A reproduction of the card hangs in the salon with this inscription: "Some public opinion felt that Hoover's promotion of the Sequoia was an indication of his inability to grasp the suffering caused by the depression."

That didn't cause Franklin Roosevelt, Hoover's successor, to use the boat any less. There are photographs of FDR happily catching a fish on the Fish Deck. Roosevelt and Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower discussed plans for D-Day on the Sequoia.

Harry Truman is said to have pondered his decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan while in seclusion on the Sequoia. Years later, President Ford used the yacht to entertain Emperor Hirohito.

Truman installed a piano that both he and Nixon played. Truman also used the boat to play poker with friends.

FDR, who used a wheelchair because of polio, had a hand-operated elevator installed so he could more easily move from his cabin to the main deck. Silversmith said that made Sequoia about the first handicapped-accessible boat in U.S. waters.

Johnson converted Roosevelt's elevator into a service bar and had the shower in the presidential stateroom lowered to better fit his tall frame.

Nixon embarked his family on Sequoia to tell them of his decision to resign the presidency, but the trip was not the quiet time he had hoped for.

Photographers lined the bridges along the Potomac River, peering down as the boat passed beneath.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 34 years.

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## Carefully read credit card offer details

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I recently received a notice in the mail congratulating me, as I had been approved for a gold card with a \$10,000 line of credit. All I needed to do, according to the solicitation, was to return the application with a small processing fee plus postage and handling. Due to my past credit history, I have had a difficult time trying to get credit cards or any extension of credit from most sources, and I am a little skeptical about a company that wants to offer me a \$10,000 line of credit. Attorney General Stovall, is this offer legitimate?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

My Consumer Protection Division receives many inquiries about companies engaging in the same - or very similar - types of practices as the one you have asked about. While my office is unable to say whether or not the company is "legitimate," we can give you some information.

According to the solicitation you described, the company is not offering an extension of credit like a major credit card company might offer. While a major credit card allows a consumer to purchase items at any location which accepts the particular type of credit card (Mastercard, Visa, Discover, American Express, etc.), the "line of credit" through this particular company is extremely limited.

Specifically, it is a \$10,000 line of credit, re-



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

deemable only towards items offered by the company and only for the prices at which those items are offered. The company's catalogs are filled with a variety of products with no guarantee of quality and, quite often, with substantially inflated prices.

In many cases, such companies offer the opportunity for consumers to qualify for a major credit card. While this seems like an effective way to obtain a true extension of credit, and perhaps a way to earn a better credit history, the qualification generally comes only after a specific amount has been spent on purchases from the company's catalog. The prices are usually so inflated beyond those charged for similar items that most consumers do not ever spend enough on purchases from the company to qualify for the major credit card.

The Kansas Consumer Protection Act (KCPA) prohibits businesses from engaging in acts and practices in consumer transactions which are deceptive and/or unconscionable. While the solicitation you received might, at first glance, lead you

to believe that you were being offered an extension of credit by a major credit card company, it is phrased carefully so that it contains no actual misrepresentations or deceptive statements.

I urge you and other Kansas consumers who are considering purchasing memberships into these "buying clubs" to read the solicitations very carefully. If a major credit card company is not specifically mentioned, that type of credit card is probably not what is being offered. Also, be cautious of any solicitation requesting a payment for an "extension of credit."

The KCPA requires that any company offering a true extension of credit must comply with the Credit Services Organization Act, which includes registration with the Kansas Consumer Credit Commissioner.

*Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, Kansas Judicial Center, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.*

## Populism and war may help Gore in 2004

Former Vice President Al Gore probably doesn't appreciate it, but he's gotten a boost from the criticism leveled against his 2000 campaign's populist theme by his ex-running mate, Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.).

And, having served eight years in the nation's No. 2 executive post, Gore is also in position to benefit as a 2004 presidential candidate when foreign policy re-emerges as a top national issue with the approach of a new war with Iraq.

In 2000, Gore famously declared that the difference between him and GOP candidate George W. Bush was that "they're for the powerful and we're for the people."

In his Democratic convention acceptance speech, he identified Bush with "big tobacco, big oil, the big polluters, the pharmaceutical companies, the HMOs" and said "sometimes you have to be willing to stand up and say no — so families can have a better life."

Lieberman, identifying himself as a "pro-business" Democrat, said late last month — not for the first time — that he was "never comfortable" with Gore's theme, deeming it too negative and smacking of "class warfare."

In the context of 2002 corporate scandals, the critique has given Gore the opportunity to reaffirm the theme and cast himself as the leading populist among his party's 2004 presidential contenders.

He did so in a New York Times op-ed piece Sunday, declaring that under Bush "uncommon power has combined with uncommon greed to create immense deceptions and losses," referring both to corporate debacles and federal deficits.

He wrote that "standing up for 'the people, not the powerful' was the right choice in 2000. And, in fact, it is the Democratic party's meaning and mission."

In 2000, Gore was the incumbent vice president and junior partner in a wildly popular (among Democrats) administration and had little trouble dispatching his rival, former Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), to win the nomination.

Going into 2004, Gore is the early Democratic frontrunner, but he'll have to fight for the nomination against what is shaping up as a strong field.

Lieberman himself would like to run, but has promised he won't do so if Gore runs. Gore almost certainly will.

To win the Democratic nomination, Gore will have to wrest trade union support away from House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (Mo.), who is certain to run if his party fails to win control of the House and who may run even if he becomes Speaker.

Moreover, it's important for Gore to regain support from the left-liberals and environmentalists who defected to Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in 2000, costing Gore the presidency.



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Had Nader not run, the lion's share of his 97,488 votes in Florida and 22,100 votes in New Hampshire would have gone to Gore, giving him a majority in the Electoral College. Nader is undecided about 2004.

One group that Gore will have difficulty attracting, though, is the so-called "Clinton diaspora," the Washington-based cadre of top aides to former President Bill Clinton who are still furious at Gore for distancing himself from Clinton during the 2000 campaign.

Gore adherents say their 2000 polls showed that Clinton would be a liability in swing states, but members of the diaspora — undoubtedly reflecting Clinton's own attitude — argue that Gore failed to capitalize on Clinton's popularity and the success of the Clinton-Gore record.

They also say that Gore ran a flawed campaign by repeatedly changing top advisers and his own political persona, indicating that he didn't know who he was and what he wanted to do.

For 2004, these aides intend to support Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle (S.D.) if he runs, but may move to Gephardt or Sen. John Edwards (N.C.) if Daschle declines.

Edwards, who already has Gore's former theme-builder, Bob Shrum, on his team, also will undoubtedly be sounding populist themes, as he did recently in blaming insurance companies — not his fellow trial lawyers — for rising malpractice premiums that are driving doctors out of medicine.

Substantively, of course, there is little major difference between the top Democrats on economics and corporate regulation.

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