P.S. to the NEWS
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GIFTS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS

In the several pages of instructions which the Lord gave after he handed down the Ten Commandments, He included this admonition: "Thou shalt take no gift; for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."

It is in line with this ancient rule that society approves a woman accepting candy and flowers from a man who is not her husband, but is harshly suspicious of a woman who accepts diamonds and furs.

It is in line with this same rule against taking gifts that Article I of the U.S. Constitution forbids all Government officials from accepting "any present ... of any kind whatever" from any "foreign state." Our State Department has a warehouse in Washington, D.C. full of gifts which other governments have given to our foreign service employees, but which the Constitution does not permit them to keep.

Somehow, the theory has developed that, whereas the receiving of gifts compromises other people, it does not compromise the President of the United States. The double standard seems to be that minor officials can be corrupted with small gifts in the hundred-dollar price range, but the President cannot be corrupted by large gifts in the hundred thousand-dollar price range.

We've come a long way, Baby, since President Herbert Hoover refused to accept even a presidential salary, and declined to permit

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his engineer son to go to work for an airline because the airline carried mail for the Government.

Nobody ever raised a moral question about the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of livestock, farm machinery, and a putting green which President Dwight Eisenhower received for his Gettysburg farm. Nobody seemed to mind when the Government built an airport for President Lyndon Johnson near his Texas ranch, or gave him the immensely valuable exclusive all-networks television franchise in Austin, Texas. Questions of impropriety were not raised when Johnson took with him, as he left the White House, filing cabinets full of documents which he could value at a high price, then take a valuable income-tax deduction for annual gifts to the Johnson Library.

Inflation has had its effect on presidential gifts, as well as on everything else. Now we hear that ITT, a corporation with problems with the U.S. Government, gave President Nixon a partial golf course at his San Clemente residence.

Meanwhile, the General Services Administration has confirmed that more than $2.2 million in public funds has been spent to improve President Nixon's personal homes at San Clemente and Key Biscayne, including such non-security items as a landscaping and watering system, a septic tank, a swimming pool heater, two golf carts, and a new heating system. There seems to be massive amnesia about Article II of the U.S. Constitution which states that the President's compensation "shall neither be increased nor diminished during the period for which he shall have been elected."

If it was wrong for a presidential aide to accept a vicuna coat or a deep freeze, or for an Internal Revenue agent to accept a ham, then why isn't it wrong for a President to accept extravagant improvements to his personal home?

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