

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Bush reveals patrician fantasy

At Kennebunkport, the President expounds his "don't worry, be happy" philosophy of governing.

When President Bush left for his three-week vacation in Kennebunkport, Maine, on Aug. 10, pressing international and domestic concerns made it appear that it was no time for the President to be seen idly trying to improve his golf swing and cruising around in his speedboat.

Bush was apparently concerned about this when he held a press conference the day before he left Washington, and then plans were announced for spokesman Marlin Fitzwater to hold daily briefings for reporters following the President to Kennebunkport.

However, Bush apparently decided that the image of the patrician President, able to enjoy life's pleasures unbedeviled by unfolding global chaos, was preferable to the image of a nail-biting workaholic. Whenever small pools of reporters were allowed within shouting range of one of his boating, jogging, or golfing forays during the first week, he steadfastly refused to say anything political.

It wasn't until over a week into his vacation that the first of his meetings with three heads of government—Danish Prime Minister Poul Schlüter, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and the new Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu—was scheduled to occur.

Bush did continue receiving daily intelligence briefings in Kennebunkport, with the task assigned to Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates the first half of the vacation, and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft the second half. Chief of Staff John Sununu came to hammer

out the final details of the President's anti-drug initiative, to be unveiled with a nationally televised speech on Sept. 5.

Sununu came over to the cramped press center at the Shawmut Hotel, about a mile north of Bush's Walker Point compound, to brief reporters after his meeting with the President Aug. 21. He gave a few more hints about what the new drug plan would look like, including its \$8 billion price tag. Ironically, at the same time that he was telling reporters how money would be trimmed from other budget items to provide the amount required for the new anti-drug effort, Richard Darman, head of the Office of Management and Budget, was telling reporters in Washington that another \$16 billion will have to be trimmed from the budget by Oct. 1 to avoid automatic sequestering of funds under the terms of the Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction law.

Darman said that in addition to \$8.1 billion being cut from the defense budget, funds for the anti-drug effort would also need to be cut, if Congress and the administration don't agree on how the \$16 billion in additional cuts will occur before the Oct. 1 deadline.

Other than Sununu's appearance before the press, the only political news out of Kennebunkport in the first week was provided not by the President, but by a delegation of Lebanese-American protesters, who demonstrated at the entrance to Bush's compound to draw attention to the Syrian-orchestrated bloodbath in Lebanon.

President Bush sent out Gates to talk with them. Gates reiterated stated

U.S. policy in a 20-minute back-and-forth exchange, adding nothing new.

Bush emerged in person on Aug. 23 to hold a press briefing for a delegation composed almost exclusively of New England journalists. While he did not have any new policy to announce, he did wax eloquent when one reporter, obviously very friendly to the President, asked him to account for why the polls show his popularity rating to be so high.

During the course of a lengthy response, Bush gave a clinically useful insight into what perception he wants the American people to have of him.

"I think there's a good feeling in the country about our institutions now—quite a change from 20 years ago," he commented. By "institutions," he was referring to the Establishment, by contrast to the era of anti-Establishment ferment that peaked in opposition to the Vietnam War and U.S. domestic economic policy in 1969.

He added, revealing the ideal conditions that the Establishment would like to create in the United States, "I think there's a recognition, as the people look around the world, that we're lucky in this country. . . . They sense the strength of the United States and they see world events coming our way. And a farmer in Kansas that's hurting, or a Maine individual who may be below the average in terms of income, may be concerned about that, but senses that freedom and democracy are on the move and that the U.S. is respected around the world."

Unfortunately, it is not just his idyllic vacation environment that is responsible for such a blind fantasy. It is the patrician goal of the ruling elites that, despite the horrors of the real world, the masses should "don't worry, be happy," to quote the refrain from what the President says is his favorite song.