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## OUR PREZ ON VACATION AND OTHER NOTES

***“Here is the difference between Dante, Milton, and me. They wrote about hell and never saw the place. I wrote about Chicago after looking the place over for years and years”***

- Carl Sandburg

Let's deal with the big question first, the President and where he and the family head for vacation. Reliable reports from deep within the travel industry tell me that the Clinton's really enjoyed their second visit to the island of St. Thomas. This time, they visited over the New Year holiday, staying in a private villa at the Sand Dollar resort. Their particular villa usually rents out for just under \$5,000 per week.

The Clinton's did some of their own cooking and, it is reported, danced barefoot in their bathing suits on the beach.

The President golfed one day at Mahogany Run, probably the best overall public course in the Caribbean, while the First lady and Chelsea went out to Megan's Bay. Buddy, the Clinton's chocolate lab, ran along the beach and seemed to thoroughly love the experience. He was accompanied by a young doggie intern, a poodle puppy named Amanda. Of course, the secret service had "sanitized" the beach somewhat in preparation for the first family's visit. They had a tad more privacy than I enjoyed when I brought my first lady to Megan's by for the first time several years ago. Half of the seventh fleet was on R&R on the beach and they had set up mess tents along the outer perimeters under the palm trees. We ended up sharing potato chips and sandwiches with a few of the soldiers while they described how difficult it was to be floating about the Caribbean on maneuvers.

The Clinton's dined at Zorba's, a tiny Greek restaurant up on Government Hill. This place would survive about a week in Chicago's greektown, but in St. Thomas it has a certain charm. The Clinton's like vegetables, or at least the Clinton ladies do. Last time they went to Zorba's the restaurant ran out of broccoli, a family favorite. This time, the broccoli was stockpiled high and the Clinton's had their fresh greens. No one seems to know where Buddy and Amanda went while everyone else was eating broccoli just down from the spot where the Carnival ship Ecstasy comes to call.

\* \* \* \*

American Airlines has several Caribbean countries in a snit. American, THE key player in Caribbean air transportation, recently announced that it plans to discontinue jet service on its feeder flights to many of the islands out of San

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Juan. The islands affected are Antigua, Aruba, Barbados, Grenada, St. Croix, and St. Lucia.

Small, tourism-dependent countries in the Caribbean look to American, which carries 70% of the airlift from the United States, for their economic salvation. Many of the island economies are so fragile that the scheduling or cancellation of one 727 flight a day could dramatically impact the success or failure of the tourism infrastructure.

There are two reasons for the cancellations. First, American, along with many other major airlines, is facing a shortage of aircraft, The second reason has a lot more to do with yield per seat. Many of the Caribbean flights do not go out full midweek.

There are two things that can happen to salvage air service to these islands. American may re-schedule some flights out of Miami instead of San Juan. Or, American eagle flights may be substituted using smaller, much smaller, aircraft,

In order to bring back service from Miami, American has announced it will seek help, in the form of subsidies, from the various Caribbean governments.

The average consumer does not fully realize the impact that negotiations regarding airline slots have on tourism around-the-world. The Greek island of Rhodes, for instance, has been tourist-rich for years because a German entrepreneur starting flying charter aircraft to the island more than ten years ago. The tourism economy of Hawaii has, in part years, risen and fallen based on decisions by Japan Airlines to operate direct flights from Tokyo.

American appears to have a masterplan. They want to drop all jet service south of San Juan. If turboprops replace jets on these routes, newly constructed hotels and resorts are bound to suffer from the dual problems of smaller aircraft and a "drop in status" as one island official put it.

American may indeed be "something special in the air". But in the Caribbean, American has plans to be something special far less often.

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I received my monthly report from the Las Vegas tourism people, more than a hundred pages of stuff. I get lots of press releases from places like chilli parlors in Texarkana and trailer parks in Cody, Wyoming. (If my city had the same name as one of Kathie Lee's kids, I'd consider moving). I never read most of the stuff but I always savor the material that comes in from Vegas. How else would I know that Gary Puckett and Don Ho will both be appearing at a place called Boulder Station. Isn't it about time for both of these guys to retire and relax a bit. The only tiny bubbles that Don Ho should be singing about are in his Geritol bottle.

Wayne Newton just finished an engagement at the MGM Grand and Tom Jones is there now. But they are not in the Grand Garden Arena. That's reserved for a show with Elton John and an episode of World Championship Wrestling,

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I'm anxious to see the latest figures on wrestling shows. The last study I read said that the most popular spectator sport in America was tractor pulling, Auto racing was a close second. But wrestling has to be up there. I just don't understand why the French think we're a bunch of yahoos.

One of the press releases informed me that a 32-year-old "canopy builder" from Oklahoma recently won \$3.005 million after dropping \$12 into a Wheel of Fortune slot machine at the Colorado Belle in Laughlin. He plans to continue working.

The 1998 Zagat survey of the city's best restaurants is out and, not surprisingly, Emeril's New Orleans Fish House in the MGM Grand leads the pack. But do check out some of the other recommendations including Spago in the Forum shops at Ceasar's, Binion's Steakhouse, Moongate at the Mirage, Stefano's in the Golden Nugget, and the Sterling Brunch at Bally's.

One of my favorite press releases from Vegas was the one that breathlessly announced that Mike Tyson will be asking the Nevada Boxing Commission for permission to wrestle at Wrestlemania XIV on March 29<sup>th</sup>. Tyson is banned from boxing in Nevada but wrestling is an entirely different sport.

I have to confess that Las Vegas is my crutch, my ace-in-the hole. When the day comes that the words dry up or terminal boredom sets in, I will take the first plane to Vegas. There, I will be invigorated by what passes for serious business in the state of Nevada. I will report what I see at night because Vegas is a place that, as one wag wrote, was never meant to be seen by the light of day,

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