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The Nation: The President's Quiet Creditor

He likes to call himself "Big Al." He is a beefy, publicity-shy, self-made millionaire. He is also a personal financier to President Nixon. This man, Robert H. Abplanalp, 51, has found himself increasingly in the public eye—a position he ordinarily avoids—since it was learned that he lent \$625,000 toward Nixon's purchase of property in San Clemente. How did Abplanalp become the President's silent business partner, and what holds their relationship together?

Abplanalp (the name is pronounced Abplanalp and means in Swiss-German "from flat mountain") has long had a taste for conservative causes and candidates. He was a strong Nixon supporter in the 1960 campaign, but the two men did not meet until 1963, when Nixon moved to Manhattan to practice law. In a restaurant, Abplanalp went up to shake Nixon's hand and said that he thought Nixon had been "robbed" in the 1960 election. The two struck up a friendship, and Nixon started going on vacation retreats to Abplanalp's private island in the Bahamas, Grand Cay. Nixon's law firm also began to represent Abplanalp's business, Precision Valve Corp., in its dealings overseas.

Several times a year the two men go on fishing trips aboard Abplanalp's 55-ft. yacht, often taking along their mutual friend, Bebe Rebozo. Sometimes their families join in. Abplanalp met his wife Josephine when she worked for one of his suppliers of plastics. They have two teen-age children, John and Marie. Describing his family, Abplanalp says: "I found a beautiful broad who's a great mother—and I've got two kids."

On the relaxed, informal yacht trips, says Abplanalp, the men rarely talk politics, but the cruises offer Nixon a chance to swap fishing and sports stories with his friends. Since Nixon took office, Abplanalp's two-story, eight-bed room house on Grand Cay has been refurbished and enlarged. The President uses the master suite while there and often works during the early morning hours in the attached private study. Besides fishing, Nixon rides around the 125-acre island on a golf cart, and swims in the shark-filled waters—always, of course, under close watch by Secret Service agents.

Abplanalp was born in The Bronx to Swiss immigrant parents. His father was a machinist who instilled in his son a liking for gadgetry and tinkering. Abplanalp studied engineering at Villanova, but dropped out to open his own machine shop. After he returned from World War II to find his shop had fallen \$10,000 in debt, he slowly began to work his way out. One day, a customer brought in an aerosol spray can with an

expensive but unreliable valve that had leaked. Abplanalp began thinking of ways to solve the problem, and eventually designed a new, less leak-prone valve.

After winning a patent for it, he founded Precision Valve Corp. in Yonkers, N.Y. The company now manufactures and markets 60% of the aerosol valves used in the world. President Abplanalp is sole owner of the company and has a net worth estimated at close to \$100 million. He also has a reputation for hiring the handicapped and being a beneficent boss. When he is not in the Bahamas, Abplanalp lives in the highly restricted New York suburb of Bronxville, where he continues to pump money into conservative political campaigns, including the 1970 election of Conservative-Republican Senator James Buckley.

What is the secret of Abplanalp's friendship with Nixon? "I think the President is intrigued with me," Abplanalp once replied. Along with Rebozo and John Connally, he seems to possess qualities that the President admires.

All are confident, blunt-talking, self-made individualists. Abplanalp also can be self-effacing. He once declared: "Edison said genius was 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration. I say it's 2% inspiration, 8% work, and 90% luck. I'm a lucky guy."

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