

opinion

It takes more work to get paid today

by Art Buchwald

I never believe government figures when it comes to how the nation's economy is doing. I talk to people. In the past months I discovered, while orders are up in the building business, payments are slowing down.

A painter told me, "I can get all the work I want right now. The only problem I have is collecting for it after I do the job."

"Why don't you ask for the money up front?" I asked.

"If I do that I can't get the job. I have this building contractor I work for and he couldn't sell his condos until they were painted. So he came to me and said, 'I'll give you \$25,000 to paint my apartments.' I said, 'When will I get paid?' And he said, 'As soon as you finish the job.' Then I said, 'Where do I get the money now to pay for the paint and my workers?' And he said, 'The same place I get mine, from the bank. Look, just tell me if you don't want the contract. I can always get somebody else.'"

"So what did you do?" I asked.

"A job's a job, so I painted his condos. When I finished I gave him my bill. He said he'd send me a check in the morning. A week later I called to find out where the check was, and his secretary said the contractor was racing a sailboat to Bermuda."

"Three weeks later I bumped into him coming out of a fancy restaurant with a bunch of friends, and he introduced me as the best painter in Washington. He said it was lucky he ran into me because he was going to call me in the morning to ask me if I could paint a second group of condos he just finished in the same development."

"I said, 'I'd love to do it but I haven't been paid for the other condos yet.' He said he couldn't pay me for the first condos until he sold the second ones. I said, 'Why is that?' And he said because the bank wouldn't lend him any money to

finish the new condominiums until he paid back his loan on the ones I painted. I said, 'It doesn't solve my problem because the same bank wants me to pay back the 25,000 plus interest I borrowed to paint the first condos.'

"He said I should never borrow more than I can afford to pay back. He wanted to know if I would do the painting job on the new development or not."

"I had to say okay. If I didn't paint the second ones I had no chance of getting my money back on the first ones. But I was tough about it. I demanded a deposit before I picked up a paintbrush."

"As a down payment for the second job?"

"No, as partial payment for the first one. How could I ask him for money for the second job when he still owed me for the other?"

"And he agreed to do it?"

"He said it was only fair. The next morning he sent over a small check with a nice note saying as soon as I finished the condos of the second development I would be paid in full for both jobs."

"So you painted the second condos, and then what happened?"

"I didn't hear from him for three months. I was about to turn it over to a lawyer when I got a call from him asking me if I was interested in painting an old building he had just bought in downtown Washington. I said, 'Where's my money for the other two paint jobs?'"

"He said he use it as a down payment on the old building he wanted me to paint. Once it was fixed up he planned to sell it at a large profit, and he had me down for a \$5,000 bonus."

"I said I wasn't born yesterday and if I agreed to do the job it would cost him \$90,000 plus a \$15,000 bonus."

"What did he say to that?"

"He said, 'What choice do I have? Workmen always have contractors over a barrel.'"

Reagan's still mum about future plans

By Helen Thomas

United Press International

WASHINGTON — Backstairs at the White House:

There has been widespread speculation in Washington circles that Nancy Reagan is not very gung ho about a second term for her husband. But she has said all along that she would be supportive of whatever he decides.

Mrs. Reagan, like all first ladies, has enjoyed some aspects of life in the White House. But she often feels confined.

The president himself let the cat out of the bag when he said in a recent interview that Mrs. Reagan was reluctant about a bid for another four years in the White House but is "willing" to go along if he gives the word.

So far, Reagan has not given the word. He is holding out, he says, until the last possible moment. That can be read many ways, and is. His aides believe 100 percent that he will run again. But they also admit that they are somewhat out on a

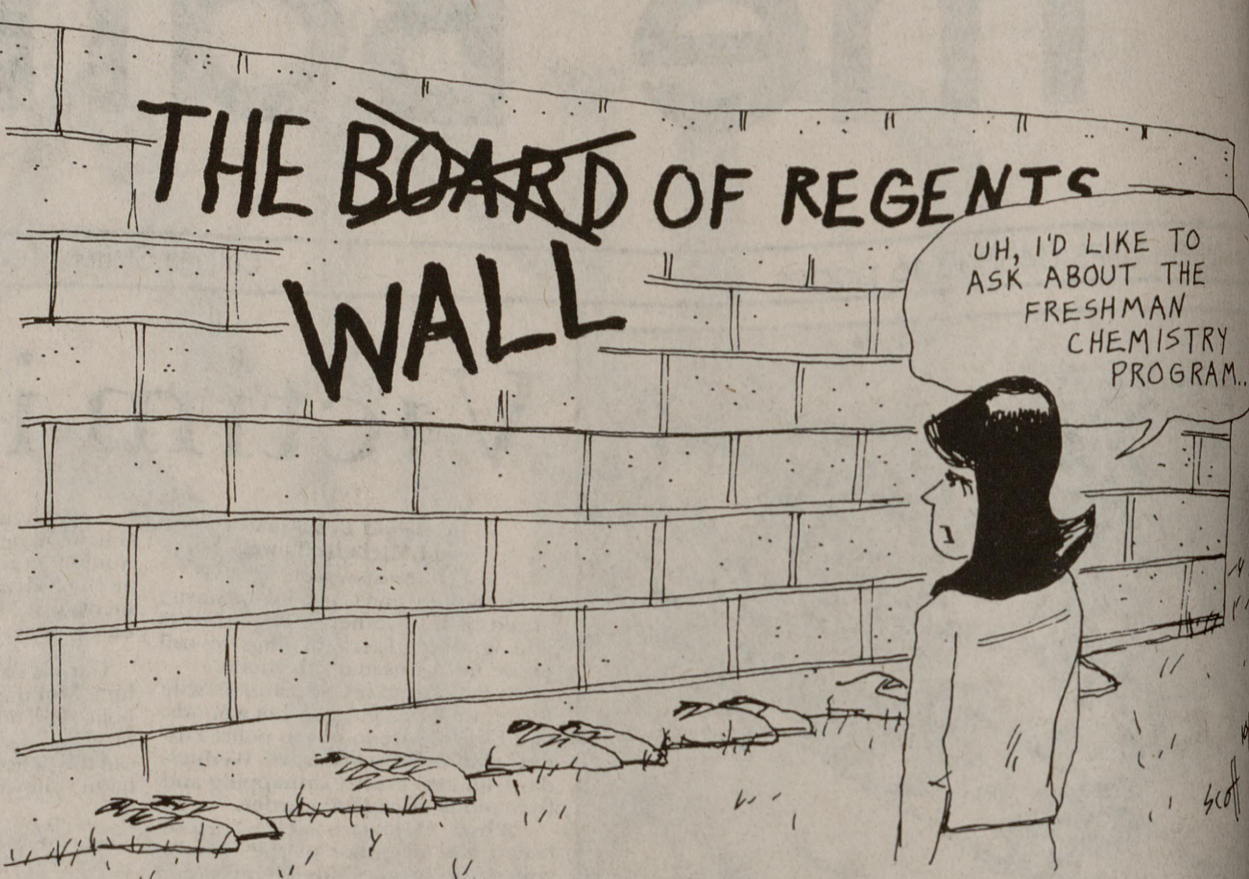
limb until he gives the green light.

Clearly he cannot be pushed into announcing his decision, one way or another. The aides have tried that, gently, and so have many of his political advisers.

There is no longer any doubt that the first couple have discussed their political future but so far they have not tipped their hands.

Deputy press secretary Larry Speakes, who has developed a warm friendship with the Los Angeles Dodgers, made arrangements to attend the last playoff game in Philadelphia between the Dodgers and the Phillies.

He spent time with the team and, with some help from manager Tommy Lasorda, had his son Jeremy outfitted in a Dodgers uniform as a bat boy for the evening. But the power of the White House did not prevail: the Dodgers lost.



Idea of 'industrial policy' won't sell to some officials

by Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer

WASHINGTON — September was the cruelest month yet for those who want to chart America's economic future. Their cause, "industrial policy," took a thrashing from Right and Left.

Yet October, and the prospect for consensus in Congress on the need for government activism in the economy, won't necessarily bring a better reception. Outside the incestuous confines of Washington and academia, industrial policy may always have an image problem.

In a Sept. 30 speech in San Francisco, James C. Miller, chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, condemned the notion that America needs a central authority to select and subsidize industries most likely to be internationally competitive. Miller warned implicitly that such a body, "insulated from politics," would encourage "despotism."

Only two days earlier, Charles L. Schultze, the former chief economic adviser to Jimmy Carter, had expressed his own doubts that a collection of government, business and labor leaders could pick "winners" more efficiently than the marketplace without protecting "losers" against foreign imports. Having challenged the very premise of industrial policy in a paper for the Brookings Institution, Schultze blamed recession and the dollar's strength — not, for example, private mismanagement — for industry's troubles.

The professor's critique came just as the AFL-CIO was preparing to release a

report echoing many Democrats' calls for massive government participation in industrial development. It could only have been a blow to those who are trying to inject credibility and clarity into what appears to be confusing and partisan concept.

Yet industrial policy enthusiasts face a more significant obstacle to public support. That is the highly-hyped emergence of modern-day Horatio Algers.

Take Bill Gates. Eight years ago, while a sophomore at Harvard, the Seattle native concocted an easily understood language, called BASIC, for programming personal computers. Today, Gates' dorm room/lab has evolved into Microsoft Corp., a supplier of software for almost half the personal computers shipped in America and a \$70 million company this year.

Take Mitch Kapor. Five years ago, Kapor interrupted a career that had included transcendental meditation and psychological counseling to buy a personal computer and refresh programming skills he'd learned in high school. Last week, Kapor's 18-month-old company, Lotus Development Corp., went public, basking in profits (\$2.8 million during the first six months of this year) principally from the sales of a computer program designed by the 32-year-old Long Island native.

Or take Walter Martin, Paul Moriates and Andy Udleson. Two years ago, the young trio (none is over 26) pooled savings and founded Flying Foods to supply

gourmet restaurants with fresh-imported — fish and vegetables. According to Venture magazine, Flying Foods now a \$3-million company, with offices in five cities.

These successful entrepreneurs, others like Apple Computer's Steve Jobs and Fred Smith of Federal Express, come to rival professional athletes and actors in star quality. More than any other group, they've helped convince many Americans that the enterprise survives rather well in the shadow of adversity. Unfortunately, advocates of industrial policy, such as the House and Senate industrial policy committees aren't likely to give their proposals any teeth in the present fiscal climate.

Industrial policy suffers for a number of reasons, not the least of which are proponents' continuing proclivity for vague and often impractical expectations. Everyone involved still sees it as his or her own idea about what industrial policy should be. More often than not, it's a "national development bank" and "infrastructure reform program," staff members now drawn from the House and Senate industrial policy committees aren't likely to give their proposals any teeth in the present fiscal climate.

But as losers give way to winners, government, not private industry, will ultimately shoulder the biggest burden of easing workers' transition from jobs. Managing that burden may eventually come to be what industrial policy is about, and at some point even the critics will have to take it seriously.

Korean crisis aids Reagan image

By Norman D. Sandler

WASHINGTON — The temperate U.S. response to the Sept. 1 Soviet attack on Korean Air Lines Flight 007 created thunder on the right for President Reagan, but may have a beneficial impact on his overall political standing.

White House strategists, who probe public opinion on a daily basis for Reagan's strengths and weaknesses, report favorable reaction to his handling of the KAL 007 affair may stem a tide of eroding confidence in his foreign policy.

Since the days of the campaign, Reagan has had to contend with what one senior aide calls "the warmonger image" — the view that he is too quick to use military power and the politics of confrontation in response to crisis.

Despite his best efforts, Reagan has been unable to completely shake that tag since taking office. But in recent months, the "war and peace" issue has become an even greater concern to his political advisers.

Polls show voters have greater confidence in the Democrats' ability to prevent nuclear war, spend defense dollars with prudence and create an atmosphere of better relations between the superpowers.

What was once viewed as a Reagan strength — his 1980 campaign relied heavily on warnings of a weakened America — has become a sore spot in his appraisal by voters. Ironically, the economy — the issue on which many Democrats had hoped the 1984 election might hinge — has been going in his direction.

But there are signs this problem may be mitigating. "He's gotten a big boost from the way he handled the KAL 007 shutdown," said one top Reagan aide. "It appears to have helped his overall job approval rating and may straighten out

some perceptions of the Reagan foreign policy."

Reading between the lines, Reagan's advisers hope that the same restrained reaction that has infuriated one critical political constituency — the far right — will help allay the fears of voters with more moderate views that he is prone to sudden, drastic action guided by an instinctive aversion to communism.

"But we're still not out of the woods," said one White House official.

Republican strategists attribute anxiety about Reagan's stewardship of foreign policy to persistent reports of factional fighting within the administration as well as his recent decisions to respond to trouble in Central America, the Middle East and Africa with shows of military force.

While Reagan boasts his policies have cured the nation of the Vietnam syndrome, survey findings suggest the same bitter legacy has caused new alarms to sound in the minds of many voters.

But the prevailing attitude at the White House has taken on a new undertone of optimism in recent days, bolstered most by polls showing most Americans agree with the way Reagan has dealt with the Soviets.

Reagan's advisers also draw encouragement from the ceasefire in Lebanon and his announced plan to visit China next year. The former is still regarded with crossed fingers, while an election-year trip to China is viewed as a certain political plum.

The trip indicates Washington and Peking share a desire for closer relations and have agreed to disagree over the thorny issue of Taiwan.

Still a variable on the Reagan foreign policy scorecard is the outcome of the arms control negotiations now under way in Europe.

While Reagan has boasted the ambitious arms control agenda of his president, his aides have acknowledged that it "takes two to negotiate." And significant breakthroughs surely will cause his political stock to soar, any sudden setback to the talks — perhaps a continued stalemate — could have opposite effect.

Slouch by Jim Egan



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