

The original documents are located in Box 50, folder “President - Personal Home - Mar-a-Lago Estate” of the Philip Buchen Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald R. Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Some items in this folder were not digitized because it contains copyrighted materials. Please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library for access to these materials.



THE LATE MARJORIE MERRIWEATHER POST

LOOKING A GIFT HOUSE IN THE MOUTH

If inflation has taken its toll on your budget, consider the problem the National Park Service faces with one of the houses it owns--the lavish Florida estate of Mar-A-Lago, bequeathed to the federal government under the will of the late Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress to the General Foods fortune.

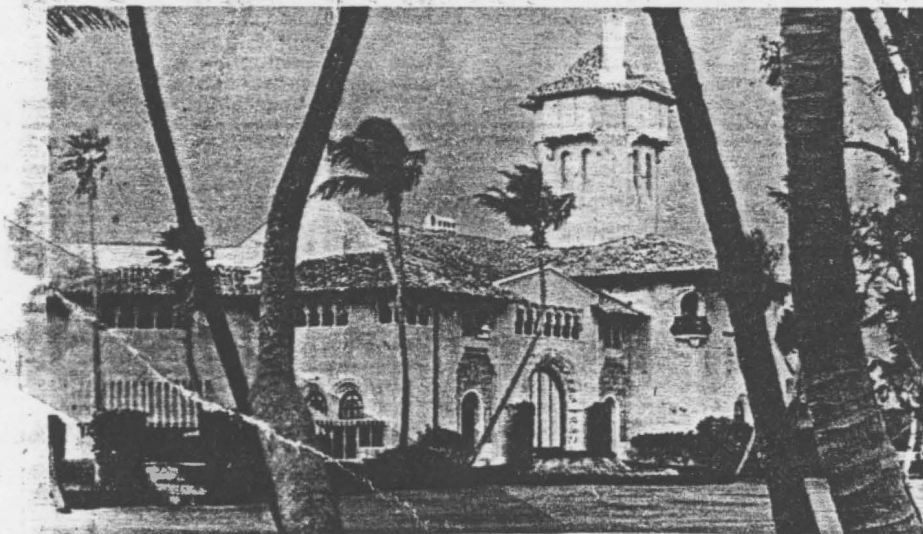
Mrs. Post's will specified that the government

was to use the estate as a winter home for either the President or foreign dignitaries, but neither the White House nor the State Department is interested because of the costs.

The Park Service, which is responsible for Mar-A-Lago, recently disclosed that it would require the services of no fewer than 22 people just to keep the main house open and properly maintained. That includes three chambermaids, two kitchen maids, one parlormaid, two footmen, three housemen and a host of others.

Their salaries, building supplies and utility bill would cost \$335,000 year--and that doesn't include another \$340,000 which the Park Service says would be required for minimal maintenance of the rest of the grounds, including four greenhouses containing 1500 plants, two large groves of citrus trees, a nine-hole golf course and 50,000 shrub

In an era when the federal government often is accused of excessive spending, Mar-A-Lago is too rich for even Uncle Sam's blood--but nobody in Washington knows what to do with the gift house.



MRS. POST'S ESTATE, MAR-A LAGO IN PALM BEACH, FLA.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

*Post
Mission*

December 17, 1974

Dear Larry:

After receiving your letter, I found out that there are difficulties in having the Federal government utilize Mar-a-Lago for its intended purposes on the conditions under which the gift was accepted. No Federal funds are available or will be provided for maintenance, and the trust fund provided by Mrs. Post appears inadequate.

I assume the Palm Beach papers will provide you with news of any later developments. In any event, I doubt that the President will be able to make use of this splendid property during the coming winter.

Bunny joins me in sending to you and Zoe our heartiest wishes for a joyful holiday season.

Sincerely yours,



Philip W. Buchen
Counsel to the President

Mr. Laurent Kimball Varnum
220 Fairview Road
Palm Beach, Florida 33480



MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 11, 1974

FOR: Philip W. Buchen
FROM: Jay T. French
SUBJECT: Marjorie Post estate in Palm Beach
Mar-a-Lago

You have inquired about Mar-a-Lago as a result of Laurent Varnum's letter.

By way of background you should know that we received a letter in November from Mr. B. H. Oehlert, Jr., (see attached correspondence record No. 69-74). Mr. Oehlert, formerly U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, is now on the town council of Palm Beach. He has opposed Interior's control of this estate and in his letter sought return of the property to the town of Palm Beach. I referred Mr. Oehlert's request directly to Douglas Wheeler, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks at Interior.

This estate was given to the Federal government along with a trust fund to provide for its maintenance. The Congress, by statute, accepted this gift upon condition that no Federal funds would be appropriated to provide for its maintenance. I understand that the trust fund is inadequate to adequately keep up the property and I believe the government would like to get rid of it.

Would you like me to prepare a response to Mr. Varnum's letter?

December 10, 1974

FOR: Philip W. Buchen
FROM: Jay T. French
SUBJECT: Marjorie Post estate in Palm Beach
Mar a Lago

By way of background you should know that we received a letter in November from Mr. B. H. Oehlert, Jr., (see attached correspondence record No. 69-74). Mr. Oehlert, formerly U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, is now on the ^{TOWN} council of Palm Beach. He has opposed Interior's control of this estate and in his letter sought return of the property to the town of Palm Beach. I referred Mr. Oehlert's request directly to Douglas Wheeler, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks at Interior.

This estate was given to the Federal government along with a trust fund to provide for its maintenance. The Congress, by statute, accepted this gift upon conditions that no Federal funds would ever be appropriated to provide for its maintenance. I understand that the trust fund is inadequate and I believe, informally, that the government would like to get rid of this property.

Would you like me to respond to Mr. Varnum?



P. W. BUCHEN CORRESPONDENCE RECORD

CONTROL NO.

69 - 74

97

CORRESPONDENCE DATA

FROM: B. H. Oehlert, Jr
TO: President Philip W. Buchen Other

DATE OF CORRESPONDENCE: 11-16

DATE RECEIVED:

SUBJECT: Mrs. M. Merriweather Post's property in Palm Beach (Mar-a-Lago)

REVIEWED BY: JTF

ACTION REQUIRED

REFERRED TO: Interview - D. P. Wheeler

FOR ACTION: INFORMATION ONLY:

ACTION - (a) DRAFT REPLY FOR: President
P. W. Buchen
Other

(b) REPLY DIRECTLY
INFORMATION COPY TO

(c) PREPARE MEMO ON RECOMMENDATIONS
AND COMMENTS FOR

SEND TO CENTRAL FILES, NO REPLY NECESSARY
SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

FINAL ACTION TAKEN

REPLY SENT (date):

SIGNED BY

REFERRED ON (date): 12-2-JTF

NO ACTION TAKEN BY THIS OFFICE:



Joy French:

Please let me know
what has developed
on, or what you have
learned about, the
Post mansion.

P.

Interior

see
President's
Official
Residence
in the
(mur-a-log)
(Post)



Laurent Kimball Varnum
220 Fairview Road
Palm Beach, Florida 33480

December 3, 1974

Dear Phil:

I have just written a note with Christmas greetings to Jerry in which I told him what a great place Palm Beach is in the winter and suggested that he should come down here and relax. I also mentioned that I am writing you about my idea for a Winter White House here.

During her lifetime, Mrs. Marjorie Merriweather Post owned a lovely home and estate here called Mar a Lago. The property extends from the ocean to Lake Worth with extensive and very private grounds which include a small pitch and putt golf course. The house is large and beautifully furnished with ample quarters for a large staff.

Adjacent to and a part of the house is a ballroom which could be used for meetings. Mrs. Post held square dances here which Zoë and I attended many times. The party always broke up precisely at 11 P.M. with the playing of Auld Lang Syne and the serving of Postum.

When Mrs. Post died some two years ago, she devised this property to the United States Government. At first some concern was expressed as to what use could or would be made of it. My impression is that there was some thought of using it as a place to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries but all I am sure of is that it is now under the supervision and control of the Department of Interior. I think it would make a fine winter White House. Anyway it is worth looking into.

Zoë joins me in warmest regards and best wishes for the Holiday Season to you and Bunny. As I told Jerry, I am certainly not looking for a job but I do have plenty of time on my hands and if I can be of service to you or him at any time, please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely,


Laurent K. Varnum



LKV/s

P. W. BUCHEN CORRESPONDENCE RECORD

CONTROL NO.

69 - 74

CORRESPONDENCE DATA

FROM: B. H. Oehlert, Jr
TO: President Philip W. Buchen Other

DATE OF CORRESPONDENCE: 11-16

DATE RECEIVED: _____

SUBJECT: Mrs. M. Merriweather Post's property in Palm Beach (Mar-a-Lago)

REVIEWED BY: JTF

ACTION REQUIRED

REFERRED TO: Interview - R. P. Wheeler

FOR ACTION: INFORMATION ONLY: _____

ACTION - (a) DRAFT REPLY FOR: President _____
P. W. Buchen _____
Other _____

(b) REPLY DIRECTLY
INFORMATION COPY TO _____

(c) PREPARE MEMO ON RECOMMENDATIONS
AND COMMENTS FOR _____

SEND TO CENTRAL FILES, NO REPLY NECESSARY _____
SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS _____

FINAL ACTION TAKEN

REPLY SENT (date): _____

SIGNED BY _____

REFERRED ON (date): 12-2 - JTF

NO ACTION TAKEN BY THIS OFFICE:



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

ROUTE SLIP

PLEASE LEAVE THIS SLIP ATTACHED TO
CORRESPONDENCE.

TO

Passy

FROM

ACTION

DRAFT REPLY FOR

REPLY DIRECTLY

PREPARE MEMO ON

RECOMMENDATIONS

AND COMMENTS

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

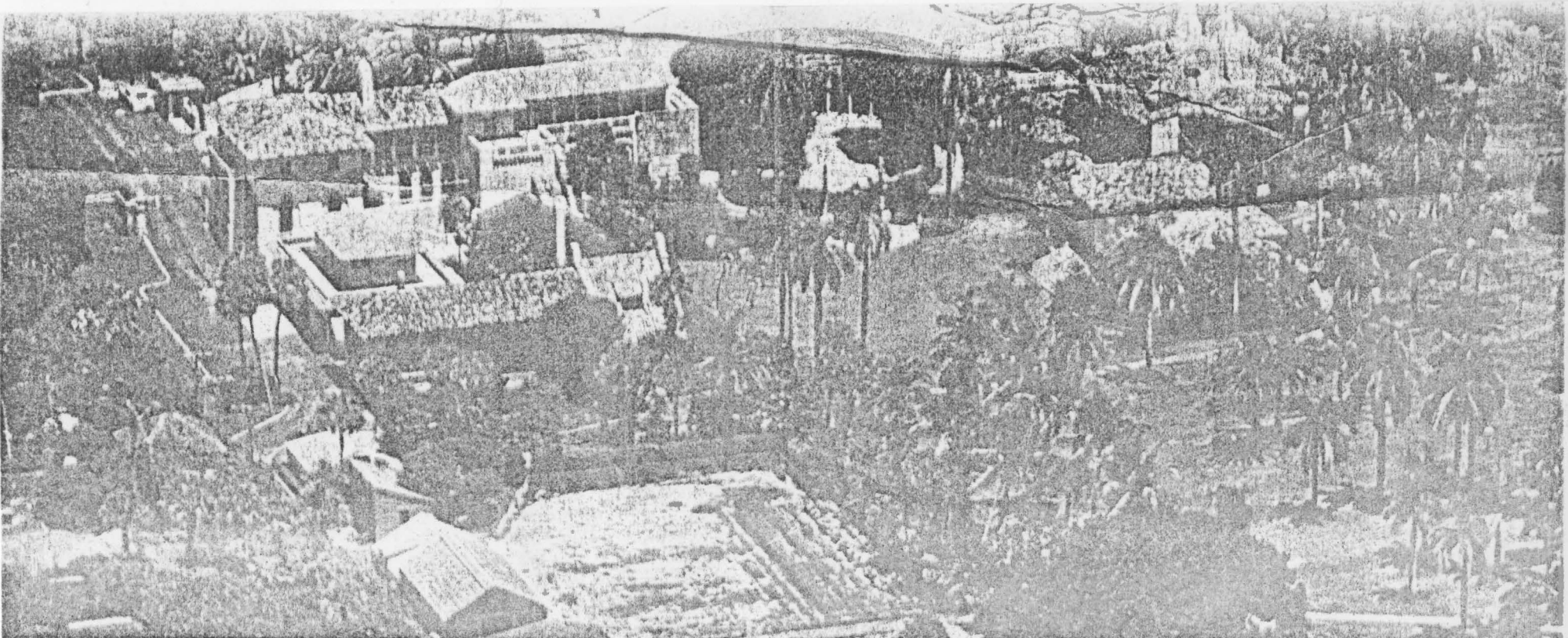
RETURN TO

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

Send to Cental files w/ other

*B. H. Oehlert, Jr. correspondence
on check w/ Eva to see
where correspondence is.*





Staff Photo by Ken Steinhoff

Mar-A-Lago

Though Priceless, It's Getting Harder To Give It Away

By CHARLES OSOLIN
Cox Newspapers Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The National Park Service has decided that the federal government can't afford to keep the palatial estate in Palm Beach willed to it by breakfast-cereal heiress Marjorie Merweather Post.

The service and its parent agency, the U.S. Interior Department, are getting ready to ask Congress to give up the

government's claim to the property and allow it to revert to Mrs. Post's estate, according to a department official.

Mrs. Post willed her 17-acre Mar-A-Lago estate to the United States when she died in September 1973 for use as a winter White House and as a guest house for visiting heads of state and other foreign dignitaries.

So far, President Ford has expressed no interest in using the lavish estate — or any other warm weather retreat —

and administration sources say the Park Service's decision to relinquish the property has received tentative White House approval. Ford has restricted his holiday trips thus far to the government compound at Camp David, Md., and to a ski resort at Vail, Colo.

Park Service estimates for maintaining the spacious oceanfront mansion and its manicured grounds run as high as \$1 million a year. Although the attorney for Mrs. Post's estate rejects that figure as

"perfectly ridiculous," Interior Department officials insist that the income from the trust fund which Mrs. Post set up to maintain Mar-A-Lago, estimated at about \$120,000 a year, is not sufficient to cover costs.

"The property can't be maintained with the money she left," said one official, "and as the income from the trust goes down and the cost goes up, the gap is steadily widening."

Turn to MAR-A-LAGO, A18



Guests Inside the Spacious House

Mar-A-Lago—From Page 1—

December 2, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR

**Douglas P. Wheeler
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Department of Interior**

Doug, this is the Mar-a-Lago correspondence of which we spoke recently. It is referred to Interior for appropriate acknowledgment and handling.

**Jay T. French
Assistant Counsel**

JF:em



Edwin keep in file

MAYOR EARL E. T. SMITH

COUNCIL

GEORGE G. MATTHEWS, PRESIDENT
YVELYNE DEM MARIX, PRES. PRO TEM
ROBERT M. GRACE
BENJAMIN H. OEHLERT, JR.
MACK L. RITCHIE



Rec'd 12-3 AM.

G. R. FROST, TOWN MANAGER
HUGH G. BRUCE, TOWN CLERK-TREASURER
E. L. MIDDLETON, TOWN ATTORNEY
FRED A. MEAD, CHIEF OF POLICE
A. J. KITTS, FIRE CHIEF
D. A. LARRABEE, SUPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS
EDWARD A. EHINGER, JR., BUILDING OFFICIAL
KENNETH LANSDOWNE, TAX COLLECTOR-ASSESSOR
ROBERT G. HUTCHEON, TOWN ENGINEER

Town of Palm Beach

P. O. Box 2029

Palm Beach, Florida 33480

November 30, 1974

Mr. J. French
Office of the White House Consul
White House
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. French:

Thank you so much for your telephone call.

I'll be looking forward to hearing further from you when your discussions with the Department of Interior (about Mar-a-Lago) have been concluded.

Sincerely,

B. H. Oehlert, Jr.
B. H. Oehlert, Jr.

gp



Tuesday 11/26/74

11:30 Ted Trimmer called about the Merriweather Post property.
It is the Mar-A-Laga property in Palm Beach, Florida.

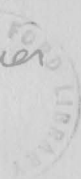
It is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior
and the responsible Assistant Secretary is Nathaniel P. Reed, Assistant
Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The most knowledgeable
person is Douglas P. Wheeler, Deputy Assistant Secretary -- 343-5347

Jay:

Kindly refer this as directed but
at the same time draft reply in
behalf of Pres. for my signature.

P

Call &
send to
Interior



122 B.
11/25

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Date

11/22

TO:

Phil Buchen

FROM:

DEWEY CLOWER

For your information

For your appropriate handling

For your review and comment

Return to me

Return to file

Return to central files

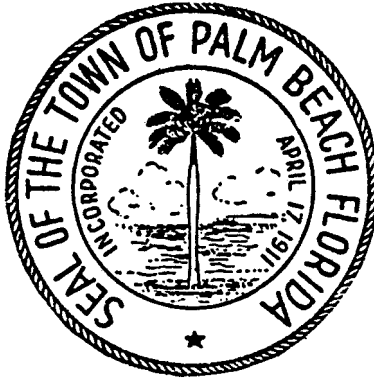
Comments:



27
MAYOR EARL E. T. SMITH

COUNCIL

GEORGE G. MATTHEWS, PRESIDENT
YVELYNE DEM MARIX, PRES. PRO TEM
ROBERT M. GRACE
BENJAMIN H. OEHLERT, JR.
MACK L. RITCHIE



G. R. FROST, TOWN MANAGER
HUGH G. BRUCE, TOWN CLERK-TREASURER
E. L. MIDDLETON, TOWN ATTORNEY
FRED A. MEAD, CHIEF OF POLICE
A. J. KITTS, FIRE CHIEF
D. A. LARRABEE, SUPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS
EDWARD A. EHINGER, JR., BUILDING OFFICIAL
KENNETH LANSDOWNE, TAX COLLECTOR-ASSESSOR
ROBERT G. HUTCHEON, TOWN ENGINEER

D. Clowers

Town of Palm Beach

P. O. Box 2029

Palm Beach, Florida 33480

November 16, 1974

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

Enclosed is a copy of my letter to you of October 19th.

I would still appreciate an opportunity to discuss this matter with someone on your staff.

Sincerely,

B. H. Oehlert, Jr.
B. H. Oehlert, Jr.
(Former Ambassador to Pakistan)

655-5426 -

655-7810

gp

enc.

October 19, 1974

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

Shortly before her death, the late Mrs. Marjorie Merriweather Post deeded her Mar-a-Lago property in Palm Beach to the government of the United States of America for use as a temporary residence of the President of the United States and for the housing of visiting heads of state.

By her will, Mrs. Post established a Trust Fund which was thought to be adequate for the maintenance of the property. The Act of Congress signed by the President (or the Committee Report which accompanied it) specifically stated that no Federal government funds were to be used, for the maintenance of the property.

I would respectfully request that consideration be given to the return of the Trust Fund to the Post Estate, and the selling of the property for uses permissible under the Zoning Ordinances of the Town of Palm Beach for the following reasons:

(1) It has now become evident that the Trust Fund is not adequate to maintain the property;

(2) If the property is to be used for the stated purposes, substantial sums of Federal funds will have to be expended for the installation of appropriate security measures as also done at Key Biscayne and San Clemente;

(3) It is submitted that both of the above



October 19, 1974

expenditures of Federal funds would be inconsistent with the intent of Congress and that of the President of the United States when he signed the legislation) and would also be extremely unpopular with the Congress and with the public, in view of the publicity given to similar expenditures at Key Biscayne and San Clemente;

(4) Additionally, I would like to mention the following considerations of importance to the Town of Palm Beach and to its' residents:

(a) The property lies at the junction of a dead-end east/west highway and the only north/south street in the Town in that area. The traffic which would be generated by the designated uses of the property would create an intolerable situation.

(b) The ownership of the property by the Government of the United States of America deprives the Town of Palm Beach of substantial and sorely needed ad valorem tax revenue.

All of us here would greatly appreciate it, Mr. President, if you would so good as to designate someone on your staff with whom I might visit about this important matter.

Sincerely,

Benjamin H. Oehlert, Jr.
(Former Ambassador to Pakistan)

gp





Mary Lasker

MAR-A-LAGO, the magnificent 17-acre Palm Beach estate of the late Marjorie Post, will undoubtedly have to be sold, said a director of the Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation.

David Close said that the decision of the Interior Department that the endowment fund of over \$3 million (current value is \$2.7 million) is insufficient to maintain the property at the proper standard for which Mrs. Post deeded it to the government, i.e., for use by Presidents of the United States and foreign dignitaries, gives the foundation little choice.

Also, both the Secret Service and State Department security officials have said it would be impossible to adequately secure the property, partly because it is under a direct flight pattern.

According to Mrs. Post's deed, it must, therefore, be transferred to the foundation, and a bill was introduced last week by Florida Rep. Paul Rogers to annul the act that authorized acceptance of the property by the government. It cost \$136,000 last year just to keep it unused.

Close said a 1969 law requires foundations to give away 6 percent of their total assets, and inheriting the \$3 or \$4 million property would add no income, but would require giving a lot more away.

"We plan to dispose of it advantageously, which obviously means we wouldn't give it away," he said.

