



CORRESPONDENTS



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[POLITICS](#)

[My Quiet Neighbor \(The President\)](#)

As the sun bathes the beach and the dunes in early morning light, I drink my first cup of coffee and see a coast guard cutter patrolling up and down the ocean shore in place of the familiar fishing trawlers. It must be looking for those radical fundamentalists who have swum across the Atlantic with scimitars in their teeth.

But, the cutter, more than mile away, runs silently across the horizon. It symbolizes President Obama's Martha's Vineyard stay -- at a secluded 25 acre "farm" a mile down the road from where I have summured since the mid-70s. His visit is (relatively) quiet, private and unobtrusive--for a President.

Much of the Obama family time is spent at their rental which has its own tennis court, beach and plenty of room to roam. They have not ventured out often together (for some fast food, and for dinner at a well-known Oak Bluffs restaurant). His rounds of golf are just as likely to be with young friends from the White House staff as large donors or famous people.

Of course, the President brings the world with him. One day he announces a second term for Fed chair, Ben Bernanke. Another, he has the sad duty of reflecting on the life and death of Ted Kennedy. Anytime he ventures out, the logistical monster which accompanies him, brushes normal citizens to the side, shuts down whole streets, and takes up all the parking spaces at any venue.

But, a state police cruiser, not five black suburbans, sits across the driveway to his summer home. The inevitable motorcades, bizarre snaky things with lights on during a brilliant summer day, pass by in a moment without stopping traffic in all directions for an hour. There are a handful of new "No Parking" signs about 400 yards on either side of that driveway to discourage gawkers from having breakfast, lunch and dinner in their SUVs waiting for a POTUS-sighting.

For the most part, late August life proceeds in leisurely fashion on this normally quiet island,

despite its noted visitor.

For Bill Clinton, who loved politics, Martha's Vineyard often seemed like an extension of the perpetual campaign (except for one quiet summer when he had some issues about family and redemption). Advance staff set up public events; his social schedule with friends, acquaintances and interesting people was bursting; he on the move, around the island, almost every day (mini golf, the country store). Whether a normal person hoping to meet The Man at Mad Martha's ice cream or the socially conscious biting their nails about whether they would be included in one of the soiree's, many on the Vineyard were pre-occupied with the annual visit by the First Family.

Why does it feel different with President Obama?

Concern for security after 9/11 may be one reason that the President is not galavanting around the island. (It is reported that the detail of approximately 60 secret service personnel who attended Clinton has swollen to more than 150 for Obama.)

Another is doubtless a political concern about appearing too visible in a "destination" resort at a time when millions of Americans are suffering greatly from the recession.

The death of a Kennedy across Nantucket Sound has caused us all to pause and reflect on the Shakespearean lives of so many in the family and has probably led the President, out of respect, to downplay any public appearances even more.

But, perhaps the answer, lies ultimately in character and personality. This is a public man who genuinely wants to get away for moments of privacy. Who wants to spend quiet time with his children, to reflect while looking at the ponds and the birds and the ocean, to read and think outside the procrustean grind of daily life, to spend comfortable time with good friends (and not meet the world in campaign mode). Perhaps, he needs a little time to regenerate his spirit and his soul.

Like so many of my other summer neighbors.

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