

RICHARD C. SHELBY, ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN

MITCH McCONNELL, KENTUCKY
LAMAR ALEXANDER, TENNESSEE
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
LINDSEY GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA
ROY BLUNT, MISSOURI
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS
JOHN HOEVEN, NORTH DAKOTA
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS
SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, WEST VIRGINIA
JOHN KENNEDY, LOUISIANA
CINDY HYDE-SMITH, MISSISSIPPI
STEVE DAINES, MONTANA
MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA

PATRICK J. LEAHY, VERMONT
PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON
DIANNE FEINSTEIN, CALIFORNIA
RICHARD J. DURBIN, ILLINOIS
JACK REED, RHODE ISLAND
JON TESTER, MONTANA
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
JOE MANCHIN, III, WEST VIRGINIA
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND

SHANNON HUTCHERSON HINES, STAFF DIRECTOR
CHARLES E. KIEFFER, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

June 25, 2020

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Thank you for transmitting the results of the investigation we requested that the U.S. Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) perform regarding the costs and impacts associated with President Trump's decision to expand Fourth of July events on the National Mall in 2019.¹ We note that your investigation found that the President's decision to expand the event roughly doubled the cost to the American taxpayer compared to previous years and required significant resources to be expended by the National Park Service; the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services; the government of the District of Columbia; and other governmental entities. We also note that your report did not address whether certain expenditures made for the fiscal year 2019 events were fully consistent with appropriations law.

Issues related to the expenditure of Federal funds continue to be timely in light of the fact that President Trump has announced his intention to conduct expanded Fourth of July events in 2020. Details for the events remain unclear, but are expected to include some type of Salute to America-style event in Washington, D.C., as well as a ticketed fireworks display and Presidential visit scheduled for the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota on July 3. As senior members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, we remain concerned that the President again intends to use these Fourth of July celebrations as a way to marshal the resources of Federal agencies to conduct *de facto* political events with official funds, and we want to ensure the Administration's actions are consistent with the principles of Federal appropriations law.

We are also concerned about the prospect of large public events in the midst of a dangerous surge in COVID-19 pandemic infections in many states across the country. We note that Members of Congress who represent the National Capital Region have already urged the Administration not to schedule a "Salute to America" event in Washington, D.C., this year because of the significant impacts that COVID-19 has had on the region and the potential public health risks of such an event. We question whether large, ticketed public events can be conducted safely and in a manner that is consistent with guidance from the Federal Centers for

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. "Independence Day Celebrations: Estimated Costs for Fourth of July Events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019," GAO-20-470 (Washington, D.C.: Published: June 17, 2020. Publicly Released: June 25, 2020).

Disease Control and Prevention and other State and local public health authorities. We also believe that appropriate action must be taken to protect the health and welfare of members of the public who attend public gatherings as well as the Federal, State and local government employees and other essential workers who will be required to participate.

Given these concerns, we believe that significant oversight is necessary to ensure transparency of and accountability for the Administration's actions to plan and execute such events, including the expenditure of taxpayer funds. As such, we respectfully request that GAO review upcoming 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and South Dakota, and undertake additional analysis of costs related to the 2019 events. The questions we specifically ask you to address in your review are as follows:

With respect to the 2020 events:

1. Specifically, what were the total estimated costs incurred by each Federal agency—including but not limited to the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Health and Human Services—that contributed resources to the planning, production and execution of Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and the Presidential visit to the Mount Rushmore National Memorial on July 3? Please include any public health mitigation or infection control measures implemented as a result of COVID-19 in your estimates.
2. How much Federal funding was spent by the District of Columbia or other State and local governments to plan and execute these events, including direct and reimbursable expenses and public health mitigation or infection control measures?
3. What were the source or sources of funds used by each agency to pay the cost of the events? For each affected agency, what is the total cost for Fourth of July events not provided for in advance through appropriations acts?
4. Did all agency expenditures comply with the principles of Federal appropriations law, including the Purpose Statute (31 U.S.C. § 1301), as well as other legal restrictions, including limitations on political activity?
5. Did the Trump Administration and its event partners take the necessary steps to ensure that any public Fourth of July events fully conformed to public health recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or other Federal, State or local public health authorities? As part of GAO's analysis, please describe public education and mitigation measures such as physical distancing guidance, required mask use, and distribution of hand sanitizer and disinfectants that were implemented by event organizers.
6. What protective measures, if any, were taken by Federal agencies to ensure the health and safety of Federal employees and other essential workers at Fourth of July events, including law enforcement officers, first responders, park rangers, medics and other support personnel?

With respect to the 2019 events:

1. GAO reported that the National Park Service, in addition to its normal operating appropriation, used two alternative sources of funds—Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act fees and the Centennial Challenge appropriation—to help pay for event costs, including funds transferred to the Executive Office of the President to pay for an event planning and production contract. Were the uses of these alternative fund sources consistent with the principles of Federal appropriations law, including the Purpose Statute (31 U.S.C. § 1301)?

We appreciate the prompt attention that you gave to our previous request regarding Fourth of July 2019 expenditures, and we ask that you renew your investigation to ensure that there is careful oversight of the Administration’s actions. Please don’t hesitate to contact us at (202) 224-7363 with any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations



Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies

/s/
Chris Van Hollen
Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations