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United States Senate

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

July 5, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

As senior members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, we write to ask the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the costs and impacts associated with President Trump's decision to expand Fourth of July events on the National Mall and determine whether Federal agency expenditures associated with them complied with longstanding appropriations law and other statutory restrictions on political activity.

Congress did not specifically provide funds to cover the costs of the President's expanded Fourth of July events, and we are very concerned by the impacts and the precedent of diverting limited Federal resources—including the use of military personnel, equipment and aircraft as well as other appropriations or visitor fees paid to improve national parks—to organize and execute unbudgeted events. Further, we are troubled by reports that preferential access to the National Mall was organized by political entities such as the Republican National Committee, which furthers the appearance that taxpayer funds were used to accomplish political objectives.

As part of our Committee's oversight of Federal spending, we ask that you review the fiscal year 2019 Fourth of July events held on the National Mall and provide us with comprehensive cost estimates for the planning and execution of these events, including personnel, security, event logistics, production, travel, transportation, communications, and related costs, as well as any costs to address resource damage created by the events. We also seek historical data to use as a comparison. As part of your analysis, we request that you separately account for each of the following events: (1) the National Independence Day Parade; (2) President Trump's Salute to America event; (3) A Capitol Fourth concert event; and (4) the annual public viewing of the National Park Service fireworks display. Finally, we ask GAO to provide legal analysis regarding whether the expenditures for the aforementioned events comply with Federal laws.

Specifically, we request that GAO examine the following questions:

1. For fiscal years 2017, 2018 and 2019, what were the total estimated costs incurred by each Federal agency—including but not limited to the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, and the Executive Office of the President—that contributed resources to the planning, production, and execution of Fourth of July events on the National Mall?

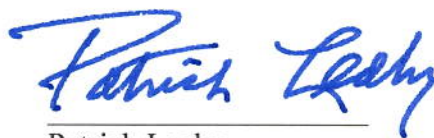
2. What were the source or sources of funds used by each agency to pay for the costs of these Fourth of July events? Please be as specific as possible regarding which appropriation or program was used as well as whether donations or third-party contributions were used.
3. For each of the same fiscal years, what were the total estimated costs to the government of the District of Columbia and other local States or jurisdictions for each of the events listed above? What portion of these costs, if any, were subject to reimbursement by the Federal government, and by which agency and appropriation?
4. For fiscal year 2019, for each affected Federal agency, what is the total unbudgeted cost for Fourth of July events not provided for in advance through annual appropriations bills? What programs or activities were delayed, deferred, or cancelled in order to pay for the expanded Fourth of July events?
5. With respect to the fiscal year 2019 Fourth of July celebration, did expenditures, including any subsequent agency communications, fully comply with the principles of appropriations law, including the Purpose Statute (31 U.S.C. §1301), Sections 715 and 718 of the fiscal year 2019 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-6) restricting funds from being spent for publicity and propaganda purposes, and other relevant statutory requirements on reprogramming of funds?
6. Did these expenditures fully comply with statutory restrictions on political activity, including the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. § 7321 et. seq.), as well as other Federal ethics laws and regulations?

Thank you for your prompt attention this urgent matter. If you have additional questions or require assistance with this request, please do not hesitate to contact us at (202) 224-7363.

Sincerely,



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



Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations



Chris Van Hollen
Member
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related
Agencies