

Open Letter to the President

October 18, 2017

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Chairman Thomas Barrack
58th Presidential Inaugural Committee
301 7th Street, SW #2080
Washington, D.C. 20599

What Has Happened to the Surplus Funds from the Inauguration?

Dear President Trump and Chairman Barrack:

We are writing to express our concern that the 58th Presidential Inaugural Committee appears not to have properly managed what is likely a massive surplus fund leftover from the Trump Inauguration more than nine months ago. We ask that the Committee promptly disclose how much money it currently holds and distribute this money back to its donors or the General Fund of the Treasury, and provide a full public accounting of the Committee's distributions and expenditures.

Under current federal law, the Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC) is required to disclose 90 days after the inauguration all contributions of \$200 or more, and is prohibited from accepting donations from foreign nationals.¹ There are no disclosure requirements as to committee expenditures or surpluses and very few restrictions on how inaugural funds may be spent, other than general guidelines from the tax code given that the PIC is registered as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization.

This lack of transparency and regulation of inaugural committee expenditures and surpluses had not raised much concern for previous committees since nearly all funds raised had been spent on the inaugural ceremonies, leaving little surplus leftover. Typically, PICs would begin disseminating what little funds were leftover three or four months after the inauguration, donating the surplus for example to a presidential library or perhaps to finance the annual White House Easter Egg Roll, and then close up shop shortly thereafter.²

¹ 36 U.S.C. 510.

² Fredreka Schouten, "What's happened to trump's leftover inaugural money?" Six months later, we don't know," *USA Today* (July 20, 2017), available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/07/20/what-happened-president-trumps-leftover-inaugural-money-six-months-later-we-dont-know/493397001/>

That is not the case with Trump's 58th Presidential Inaugural Committee. Trump's Inaugural Committee raised an all-time record of \$107 million,³ well over twice the amount raised by Obama's 2009 Inaugural Committee, and in all likelihood spent considerably less for Trump's inauguration than was spent on either of Obama's inaugurations. Despite record fundraising from about 250 wealthy donors,⁴ Trump's inauguration shaped up to be a relatively low-key affair. Obama's 2009 inauguration stretched over five days, involving 10 official balls and hosted a record public attendance.⁵ Trump's inauguration lasted three days, involved three official balls, and hosted a much smaller crowd.⁶

Though no disclosure records currently exist, and Trump's PIC is not answering questions about its expenditures, given the relatively small size of this year's inauguration it is reasonable to estimate that at least half or more of the \$107 million raised by Trump's Inaugural Committee could remain leftover as surplus, at least if it was spent in line with previous inaugurations.

So what has happened to all this money? Does a substantial surplus in fact exist? If not, why not?

Trump's Inaugural Committee has stated that it will donate the surplus to charity, but so far the committee has said that only a certain amount has been spent for renovations of the White House and the Vice President's residence and another \$3 million has been donated to hurricane relief.⁷ That apparently leaves tens and tens of millions of dollars unaccounted for.

Once again, we ask that the 58th Presidential Inaugural Committee provide a full accounting of its expenditures and promptly distribute any surplus funds to donors or the General Fund of the Treasury.

Sincerely,

American Family Voices
Campaign for Accountability

³ Sarah Burris, "Slush fund': Maddow follows the money from Trump's 'giant pile of inaugural fund cash,'" Raw Story (Sep. 21, 2017), available at: <https://www.rawstory.com/2017/09/slush-fund-maddow-follows-the-money-from-trumps-giant-pile-of-inauguration-fund-cash/>

⁴ Ashley Balcerzak, "250 donors shelled out \$100k or more for Trump's inauguration, providing 91% of funds," OpenSecrets.Org (April 19, 2017), available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2017/04/250-donors-shelled-out-100k-or-more-for-trumps-inauguration/>

⁵ John Wagner and Karen Tumulty, "Surprisingly, Trump inauguration shapes up to be a relatively low-key affair," Washington Post (January 16, 2017), available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/surprisingly-trump-inauguration-shapes-up-as-relatively-low-key-affair/2017/01/16/dad118e0-d9ac-11e6-9f9f-5cdb4b7f8dd7_story.html?utm_term=.17da513155a1

⁶ Lisa Rein, "Here are the photos that show Obama's inauguration crowd was bigger than Trump's," Washington Post (March 7, 2017), available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2017/03/06/here-are-the-photos-that-show-obamas-inauguration-crowd-was-bigger-than-trumps/?utm_term=.1f2057a3cecd

⁷ Maggie Haberman, "Trump's inaugural committee to donate \$3 million to hurricane relief," New York Times (Sep. 27, 2017), available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/us/politics/trump-inaugural-committee-donations-hurricanes.html>

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Common Cause

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Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement

Prof. James A. Thurber

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Public Citizen