



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on House Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate

Subject: GAO's Review of the 2017 Presidential Transition

This letter confirms our commitment to examine the 2017 presidential transition on the basis of your letter to the Comptroller General. As discussed with your staff on February 27, 2017, we plan to complete our work and send a draft product to the agencies for comment in June 2017. The enclosure sets forth the key aspects of the engagement.

We look forward to working with you and your staff on this engagement. If you have questions, you may contact me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the Assistant Director, [REDACTED], at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Sincerely yours,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Acting Director
Strategic Issues

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Krista Boyd
Mr. Brian Cohen
Ms. Susannah Savage

Terms of Work

Objectives/Key Questions

The change from one presidential administration to the next is a complex process requiring coordination between the incoming and outgoing Presidents and their teams. GAO will answer the following questions:

1. What laws and federal entities guide the orderly transfer of executive power during a presidential transition and after inauguration, and what ethics-related provisions apply to those involved in a transition?
2. What are GSA's processes to manage funds appropriated for the 2017 post-election incoming presidential transition and what were the types and amounts of expenditures made with these funds as of January 31, 2017? How much in private funds did the transition team report collecting and spending for the 2017 transition?
3. What information and services related to conflicts of interest and financial disclosure did the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) make available during the presidential transition and after inauguration? What is known about the transition team's use of OGE's services and how do the information and services provided for the 2017 transition compare to the 2009 and 2001 transitions?
4. What information and services related to communication with heads of foreign governments were made available to the President- and Vice President-Elect and transition team? What is known about the transition teams use of services and how do the information and services provided for the 2017 transition compare to the 2009 and 2001 transitions?

Scope and Methodology

For our first objective, we will analyze and report the activities authorized, required, or encouraged in the Presidential Transition Act, as well as significant changes to the original 1963 act and the underlying reasons, and related statutes. To understand the role of OGE, GSA, and other relevant federal entities during transition we will review laws and interview agency officials at OGE, GSA, as well as the Federal Transition Coordinator. We will review and summarize select ethics-related provisions applicable to executive branch employees and describe to what extent, if any, these provisions apply to the President-and Vice President-Elect, the transition team, and the President and Vice President. We will identify these provisions based on our independent research and review of OGE documentation.

For our second objective, we will review (a) appropriations laws; (b) agreements between GSA and the presidential transition team; and (c) GSA's processes and any documentation available on the management of federal transition funds and the processing of expenses for the 2017 presidential transition. We will review transactions data to determine the types, e.g., payroll, travel, supplies, etc., and amounts of spending made for the 2017 presidential transition from November 9, 2016 through January 31, 2017. To understand the processes in place to manage federal transition funds, we will also interview GSA officials and others as needed. We will summarize information reported by the transition team on the private funds collected and expended on transition activities. Additional analysis of the transaction data and possible comparison with prior transitions would be part of a separate review.

Terms of Work

For our third objective, we will review and summarize relevant documents developed by OGE for transition. We will review documentation and interview OGE officials on the information and services made available to and used by the transition team. To the extent possible, we will obtain the perspective of the transition team regarding the information and services provided by OGE. If available, we will describe how the information and services provided for the 2017 transition compare to the 2009 and 2001 transitions.

For our fourth objective, we will review and summarize relevant documents on the information and services related to communications with foreign governments that State made available and were used by the President- and Vice President-Elect and transition team, such as State's support in facilitating communication between the President- and Vice President-Elect and foreign governments. To the extent possible, we will obtain the perspective of the transition team regarding the information and services provided by State. If available, we will describe how the information and services provided for the 2017 transition compare to the 2009 and 2001 transitions. Based on discussions with DOD and DHS officials, their agencies have no role in providing information and services related to communications between foreign governments and the transition team.

The work will be done in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Reporting on Status of Our Work

We will periodically discuss the status of our work with you and/or your staff.

Date to Agency(s) for Comments

After we have developed the product's preliminary message, we will provide a specific date when a draft of the product will be sent to the Office of Government Ethics, the General Services Administration, State Department, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and the Executive Office of the President for comment. Please notify us if you wish to receive an informational copy of the report when it is sent to the agencies for comment.

Product Issuance Date

Once we have received agency comments, we will set a product issuance date and notify you of this date.