

Stop Ballroom Bribery Act

Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Robert Garcia

President Trump is raising money from dozens of companies, foundations, and individuals to construct a \$300 million White House ballroom that he has publicly dreamed of for 15 years. Donors are eligible to have their names etched into the walls of the White House. President Trump claims he has raised \$350 million so far, and it is unclear what he plans to do with any leftover funds.

Many donors currently need something from the Trump administration. For example: Google, which recently donated \$22 million to settle President Trump's censorship lawsuit against YouTube, will benefit if the DOJ decides not to appeal a recent judicial ruling in an antitrust case; Union Pacific is seeking federal approval of a merger; and Palantir is seeking federal contracts. The list goes on.

Meanwhile, the White House has not been fully transparent about who is donating and how much. While the White House published a list of donors, it does not include every reported donor, and donors have been given the option to donate anonymously.

President Trump may soon initiate other privately funded building projects for his personal use or aggrandizement. For example, he is reportedly planning to build a triumphal arch for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. When asked by a reporter, President Trump confirmed the arch is for himself; the project is now being called the "Arc de Trump." It remains to be seen how he plans to fund the construction of this arch.

Donations for such projects at the White House and National Mall are often channeled through the National Park Service (NPS) and its philanthropic partners. While the White House does not have its own gift acceptance authority, NPS is authorized to accept certain private gifts on its behalf. Nonprofits with formal ties to property used by the President and Vice President — including the Trust for the National Mall, the White House Historical Association, and the Vice President's Residence Foundation — present unique conflict-of-interest risks when fundraising from entities with interests pending before the federal government.

While the Trump Administration is using such donations most egregiously, it is not the first to take potentially concerning donations for building projects at the White House or Naval Observatory. For example, in 1999, Vice President Al Gore was critiqued for renovating the Naval Observatory with donations from General Motors, Coca-Cola, and other corporations that appeared to be "making an investment in the vice president's residence for access and influence."

The ***Stop Ballroom Bribery Act*** would root out one category of pay-to-play opportunities: funding the construction, improvement, or enjoyment of public property that is primarily used by or that honors the President or Vice President (VP). The bill would:

- **Impose pre-donation restrictions:** A donation could only be used for covered projects if the Senate-confirmed directors of the National Park Service (NPS) and Office of Government Ethics (OGE) determine that the donation complies with key restrictions:
 - Ban donations from entities and individuals that present a conflict of interest: those facing litigation or federal enforcement actions, receiving or seeking federal contracts or grants, lobbying the federal government, and those who are seeking or have received a pardon or presidential appointment from the sitting President
 - Make clear that donations cannot be conditioned on receipt of benefits from the federal government, be coerced, or appear to influence government action
 - Ban the President, VP, and their families and staff from soliciting donations
 - Require Congress to approve any foreign government donations
- **Impose post-donation restrictions:**
 - Prohibit displaying donors' names and logos as recognition of the donation
 - Impose a two-year cooling-off period before a donor to a covered project can lobby the federal government
 - Prohibit converting leftover donated funds to anyone's personal use or using leftover funds to benefit the President, VP, or their family or staff
- **Require transparency:**
 - Donors must disclose any meetings with the federal government (including the President and VP and their spouses, children, and agents working on their behalf) that occur within one year of the donation
 - NPS must publish on a quarterly basis the details of all donations to covered projects (amount, donor name, meetings between the donor and federal government, etc.)
 - Donations cannot be made anonymously or in someone else's name
 - NPS and OGE must publicly disclose their determination to permit a donation
- **Enable enforcement:**
 - Permit judicial review of the NPS-OGE decision that a donation is permissible
 - Allow state attorneys general and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to seek civil penalties and disgorgement of the donation, and DOJ to seek criminal penalties
 - Create a 10-year statute of limitations for future administrations to seek remedies
 - Permit OGE to disgorge improperly made donations
- **The bill would cover the following types of projects:**
 - The construction, improvement, or other alteration of property on the White House grounds, VP's residence, or other public property that the President or VP regularly use (such as Camp David or Air Force One)
 - Events hosted at such locations
 - Monuments or other structures that honor a living President or VP