

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 13, 2026

Catherine Townsend  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Trust for the National Mall  
1717 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 250  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Townsend:

We write to follow up on our October 23, 2025 letter regarding your organization’s role as the fundraising conduit for President Trump’s \$400 million ballroom at the White House — a role for which your organization stands to benefit to the tune of \$10 million.<sup>1</sup> Your November 7, 2025 response<sup>2</sup> to that letter was woefully inadequate, disowning the Trust for the National Mall’s (“the Trust”) substantive role in the fundraising process and declining to provide Congress and the American public with answers to any of the questions that we asked regarding the nature of your arrangement with President Trump and donors to his ballroom.

Your delays and refusal to answer our questions become even more troubling as the project rapidly moves forward: the White House has submitted information to the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, and is seeking approval for the project by March,<sup>3</sup> and President Trump spent the morning of January 2, 2026 “perusing samples of stone” to be used in the project.<sup>4</sup>

The Trust for the National Mall is a 501(c)(3) chartered non-profit tax-exempt charity and, as such, enjoys substantial taxpayer-subsidized benefits — as do its donors. But these benefits come with responsibilities: your organization cannot be “operated for the benefit of private interests,” cannot “attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities,” and cannot “participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates.”<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, press reports indicate that your organization is earning millions of dollars from serving as a pass-

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to the National Park Service and the Trust for the National Mall, October 23, 2025,

[https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ballroom\\_letter\\_to\\_the\\_trust\\_on\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_and\\_the\\_national\\_parks\\_service.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ballroom_letter_to_the_trust_on_the_national_mall_and_the_national_parks_service.pdf); CBS News, “Trump looks to cement his architectural legacy as Democrats bristle,” Arden Farhi and Jennifer Jacobs, October 17, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-looks-to-cement-his-architectural-legacy-as-democrats-bristle/>.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from the Trust for the National Mall CEO Catherine Townsend to Senator Elizabeth Warren, November 7, 2025, [https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response\\_from\\_the\\_trust\\_for\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_to\\_senator\\_warren\\_11725.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_the_trust_for_the_national_mall_to_senator_warren_11725.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> CBS News, “White House aiming to get final approval for Trump-backed ballroom by March,” Arden Farhi and Joe Walsh, January 2, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/white-house-final-approval-trump-ballroom-march/>.

<sup>4</sup> CNN, “Trump shops for marble for new White House ballroom,” Adam Cancryn, January 2, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/02/politics/white-house-ballroom-marble-trump>.

through for ballroom funds.<sup>6</sup> You owe Congress and the public answers about your role in managing funds for President Trump’s ballroom. As such, we write to reiterate our request that you provide information on fundraising practices, tax deductions for donors, and other matters related to the Trust’s role with the ballroom.<sup>7</sup>

In your letter, you indicated that the Trust for the National Mall “is not soliciting donations for the Ballroom and has no role in the planning, design, or construction of the new Ballroom.”<sup>8</sup> However, the Trust appears to be playing a key role in the project as the entity receiving — and presumably disbursing — the funds to pay for the ballroom. The organization also appears to be enjoying substantial financial benefits by doing so: public reporting indicates that the Trust retains 2.5 percent of each donation made in connection with the White House ballroom project as an administrative fee.<sup>9</sup> Thus, if the Trust raises \$400 million or more for the ballroom — the President’s latest cost estimate — the Trust could collect \$10 million in fees, a substantial windfall for the Trust.<sup>10</sup>

Your letter does not dispute that the Trust is the primary mechanism through which funds for the ballroom are being accepted, managed, and disbursed.<sup>11</sup> However, it does not explain how the Trust attempts to ensure that it — and its donors — are insulated from potential participation in quid-pro-quo arrangements. This leaves open the question of whether the Trust is being misused to facilitate special-interest access and influence.

These concerns are particularly acute in light of National Park Service (NPS) donation rules, including “Director’s Order #21,” which prohibits donations that carry either “an actual [or] an implied commitment to take an action favorable to the donor,” and requires NPS and its philanthropic partners to avoid any appearance of endorsement, preferential treatment, or

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<sup>5</sup> Internal Revenue Service, “Exemption requirements - 501(c)(3) organizations,” last updated August 20, 2025, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exemption-requirements-501c3-organizations>.

<sup>6</sup> CBS News, “Trump looks to cement his architectural legacy as Democrats bristle,” Arden Farhi and Jennifer Jacobs, October 17, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-looks-to-cement-his-architectural-legacy-as-democrats-bristle/>.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to the National Park Service and the Trust for the National Mall, October 23, 2025, [https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ballroom\\_letter\\_to\\_the\\_trust\\_on\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_and\\_the\\_national\\_parks\\_service.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ballroom_letter_to_the_trust_on_the_national_mall_and_the_national_parks_service.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Letter from the Trust for the National Mall CEO Catherine Townsend to Senator Elizabeth Warren, November 7, 2025, [https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response\\_from\\_the\\_trust\\_for\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_to\\_senator\\_warren\\_11725.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_the_trust_for_the_national_mall_to_senator_warren_11725.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Public Citizen, “Government Contractors, Tobacco and Tech Fund White House Demolition,” October 23, 2025, <https://www.citizen.org/news/government-contractors-tobacco-and-tech-fund-white-house-demolition>; CBS News, “Trump looks to cement his architectural legacy as Democrats bristle,” Arden Farhi and Jennifer Jacobs, October 17, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-looks-to-cement-his-architectural-legacy-as-democrats-bristle/>.

<sup>10</sup> The Hill, “Trump: Cost of new ballroom may reach \$400M,” Brett Samuels, December 17, 2025, <https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/5652531-trump-cost-new-ballroom-400m/>.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from the Trust for the National Mall CEO Catherine Townsend to Senator Elizabeth Warren, November 7, 2025, [https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response\\_from\\_the\\_trust\\_for\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_to\\_senator\\_warren\\_11725.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_the_trust_for_the_national_mall_to_senator_warren_11725.pdf).

influence over federal decision-making.<sup>12</sup> Your response fails to provide information about how the Trust is ensuring compliance with these rules while accepting what could be hundreds of millions of dollars in donations for President Trump’s ballroom from corporations that have significant matters pending before federal agencies controlled by the President.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, while you cite donor confidentiality obligations, that assertion does not relieve the Trust of its responsibility to account for its fee structure, revenue expectations, internal approvals, compliance with applicable policies, communications with the White House, and more — particularly when the Trust may be profiting from its role in a highly politicized and self-enriching project.

Accordingly, we reiterate and expand our prior requests. Please provide the following information no later than January 27, 2026:

1. The Trust’s complete fee structure and agreements related to the White House ballroom project, including any percentage-based administrative fees, flat fees, reimbursements, or other compensation the Trust receives or expects to receive, and any responsibilities or requirements of donors.
2. The total amount of donations the Trust has collected to date for the ballroom project, the names of the donors and the total amount it expects to collect over the life of the project.
3. The total amount of fees retained by the Trust associated with these donations.
4. Any internal Trust analyses, board discussions, or approvals related to the decision to participate in the ballroom project and to accept fees associated with it.
5. An explanation of how the Trust determined that its participation in this project is consistent with its mission and with NPS donation rules.
6. The steps the Trust has taken to ensure that donations accepted for the ballroom project are not connected, explicitly or implicitly, to donor access, favorable treatment, or federal decision-making.
7. The nature of the Trust’s connection to fundraiser Meredith O’Rourke, including whether O’Rourke (or her company Forward Strategies Inc. or any other company she owns) is formally or informally affiliated with the Trust and whether the Trust pays her any administrative, management, consulting, or other fees related to her ballroom fundraising services.


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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, “Directors Order #21: Donations and Philanthropic Partnerships,” December 28, 2016, pp. 14, 20, 22, [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/policy/upload/DO\\_21\\_12-28-2016.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/policy/upload/DO_21_12-28-2016.pdf).

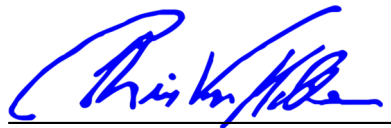
<sup>13</sup> Letter from the Trust for the National Mall CEO Catherine Townsend to Senator Elizabeth Warren, November 7, 2025, [https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response\\_from\\_the\\_trust\\_for\\_the\\_national\\_mall\\_to\\_senator\\_warren\\_11725.pdf](https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/response_from_the_trust_for_the_national_mall_to_senator_warren_11725.pdf).

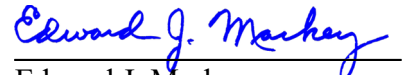
The American public deserves transparency about whether a nonprofit partner of the National Park Service is being used, and financially rewarded, as a conduit for corporate influence and presidential vanity projects. We look forward to your prompt response.

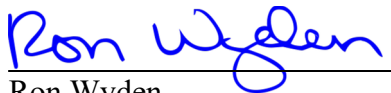
Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator