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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025
<https://appropriations.senate.gov>

July 29, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

On July 21st, the Office of Management and Budget transmitted a list of provisions for Congress to consider for a short-term continuing resolution. Included on the list was an unspecified amount of funding within a larger sum of \$113 million “to recoup costs associated with support of events celebrating America’s Semiquincentennial.” Our understanding from the administration was that taxpayer funds would contribute \$150 million and private donations would contribute the balance of the funding. Given that understanding, what has gone wrong that has led to this additional request for taxpayer funds?

In a follow-up briefing, your staff relayed that the Department is seeking \$10 million to reimburse National Park Service (NPS) costs incurred during the Freedom 250 events on the National Mall. These events are the Rededicate 250 prayer event, the Great American State Fair, and the July 4th Salute to America. According to your staff, these were routine costs for event support. The National Capital Area Event Planning Guide describes event support as including U.S. Park Police costs, event monitoring costs, overtime for NPS employees, and repairing resource damages.¹

Congress has already provided substantial funding for these activities. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, enacted into law with only Republican votes in July of 2025, provided \$150 million to the Department of the Interior, through the National Park Service, for events and activities related to the semiquincentennial. The request for an anomaly indicates that all of this funding has already been obligated in support of a number of events related to the semiquincentennial, including those on the National Mall.

The National Park Service reportedly provided much of this federal funding directly to the Freedom 250 organization, and Freedom 250 then combined this federal funding with private donations. The President solicited millions of dollars in private donations, and public reporting

¹ <https://home.nps.gov/nama/learn/management/event-planning-guide.htm>

indicated that Freedom 250 had raised \$22 million by April.² While Freedom 250 has not released a complete list of donors and amounts donated, despite calls from members of Congress and public watchdog organizations³, Freedom 250's website features the logo of major corporations such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Boeing, SAP, UnitedHealth Group, Mastercard, United Airlines, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Deloitte, Exiger, and Palantir⁴.

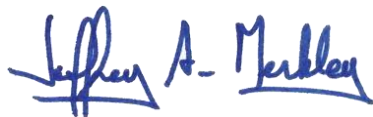
It is unacceptable to ask the American people to bail out Freedom 250. Congress already appropriated \$150 million—without bipartisan input—with the administration promising that private donors would help finance the rest. If the administration designated Freedom 250 as the responsible entity for these events, Freedom 250—not taxpayers—should be paying the remaining costs.

Please respond to the following by close of business Friday August 7th:

- Please provide a full accounting of how the National Park Service (NPS) has obligated and expended the \$150 million provided in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act for semiquincentennial events and activities.
- Please provide a full accounting of how Freedom 250 has allocated and spent its funding, including any allocations and spending planned for the future.
- Please provide a list of donors, and the date and amount of each donation, to the Freedom 250 organization. Please include any withdrawn or canceled donations.
- Please provide a list of costs incurred by NPS for each event carried out with any amount of funding provided by the Freedom 250 organization. Please include future expected costs such as resource repair. Please provide this information by each event and each type of cost to NPS (e.g., Park Police, permit monitors, resource repair, etc.).
- What are Freedom 250's plans to complete its activities and terminate operations, and where will any remaining funding be transferred?

Thank you for your prompt answers to these questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeffrey" and last name "Merkley" clearly legible.

Jeffrey A. Merkley

United States Senator

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Committee on Appropriations

² <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/the-rival-groups-waging-an-expensive-battle-over-americas-250th-acfb0682>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/03/05/america-250-freedom-250-trump-celebration/>
<https://peer.org/unraveling-the-scandals-surrounding-americas-anniversary-celebration/>

⁴ <https://www.freedom250.org/>