

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 3, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

On June 6, 2019, my colleagues and I sent a letter to President Trump regarding his plans to host a de facto campaign rally at the Lincoln Memorial on the Fourth of July. In that letter, we expressed our concerns about the cost, resource protection, and visitor safety impacts of President Trump overtaking this annual celebration. In spite of our concerns, the president is moving forward with his plans at the expense of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and other federal agencies that will now be required to plan and manage this sideshow.

While topline cost increases have not yet been made available—and given the extent of the festivities, it is likely those costs will be significant—the *Washington Post* reported last night that DOI plans to divert \$2.5 million in entrance fee revenues collected under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) to cover a portion of the added event costs.<sup>1</sup> This is a troubling development, especially given previously expressed congressional concerns about DOI's use of FLREA fees to fund operations during the most recent government shutdown.<sup>2</sup>

It is concerning that when my staff called to confirm the intended use of FLREA funds, they were told no information would be made available until after the Fourth of July, presumably after these funds had already been spent to support the president's rally.

FLREA fees are intended to fund projects that enhance the visitor experience on our public lands. We ask taxpayers to pay an additional small fee to support projects that enhance their public lands experience; they are not a slush fund to fulfill the administration's whims and immediate desires. Tapping these funds for this rally is a blatant misappropriation and a violation of that agreement with the American public.

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<sup>1</sup>Eliperin, J., Dawsey, J., & Lamothe, D.. (2019, July 2). Park Service diverts \$2.5 million in fees for Trump's Fourth of July extravaganza. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-gives-tickets-to-trumps-july-fourth-extravaganza-to-gop-donors/2019/07/02/9109a566-9ce0-11e9-b27f-ed2942f73d70\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.56ff905b534e&wpisrc=al\\_news\\_alert-politics--alert-national&wpmk=1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-gives-tickets-to-trumps-july-fourth-extravaganza-to-gop-donors/2019/07/02/9109a566-9ce0-11e9-b27f-ed2942f73d70_story.html?utm_term=.56ff905b534e&wpisrc=al_news_alert-politics--alert-national&wpmk=1)

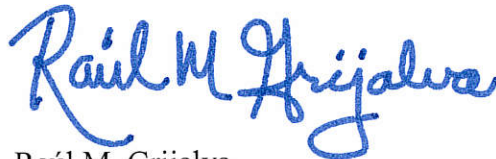
<sup>2</sup>Grijalva, R. (2019, June 24). Letter from Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva to Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt on use of FLREA fees. Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Grijalva%20Letter%20to%20Bernhardt%20on%20FLREA%20Funding%20June%2024%202019.pdf>

We have heard constantly throughout this Congress that DOI's maintenance backlog is the most pressing issue facing the Department. You highlighted the backlog as a top priority in your own testimony before this Committee. Yet DOI has raised no objection to illegally diverting \$2.5 million to pay for an event that will have lasting negative impacts on the resources of the National Mall and Memorial Parks.

Please provide a justification for DOI's use of FLREA dollars to support this partisan event and a detailed list of the projects that will lose funding due to this misappropriation. Congress and the American people deserve transparency.

I look forward to your immediate written response and urge you to reconsider the Department's unlawful use of FLREA funds to support this politically charged event.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva

Chair

Committee on Natural Resources