

**OPINION:**

# We still don't know where inauguration funds went

**By Robert Weiner and Jared Schwartz**

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There is no day that defines the institution of the presidency more than the Inauguration. From Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address to JFK's first, inauguration day is a celebration of peaceful transfer of power.

Yet according to Federal Election Commission filings and reporting by OpenSecrets, of the \$106 million raised for President Donald Trump's inauguration, more than double the amount by either of Barack Obama's inaugurations, it is still almost entirely unclear how most of that money was spent. A presidency begun under dubious financial circumstances is an administration created in suspicion, and clearing up that suspicion is crucial to protecting this presidency, and all presidencies to come.

For Trump's inauguration, there were fewer events and far fewer staff than for either Obama's or George W. Bush's. Even Greg Jenkins, who organized Bush's inauguration, told Rolling Stone that "they had a third of the staff and a quarter of the events and they raised at least twice as much as we did. So there's the obvious question: Where did it go? I don't know."

Reporting by The New York Times indicates that \$25 million went to Hargrove Inc., a company that traditionally manages inaugurations. Another \$26 million was paid to WIS Media, a firm owned by a friend of the first lady, which was created six weeks before the inauguration. A little over \$10 million went to three other event planning companies, and \$5 million went to charity, leaving \$40 million unaccounted for.

Both the obvious ethical problems posed by giving \$26 million to a family friend and the unaccounted millions demand congressional investigation and action. How can tens of millions of dollars go missing, right at the start of a presidency, and not trigger any congressional investigation

These issues are being swept under the rug because congressional Republicans, who now run congressional investigations, have neither the will nor, by choice, the independence from the administration, to do what a co-equal branch should do: investigate and legislate.

Should Democrats win back the House, they should immediately open an investigation and either request or subpoena the financial records of WIS Media and the Trump Inauguration Committee. Congress must ask whether WIS Media did any relevant work or was simply a payout to a friend. The committee could ask those who received payment what they did and what they know about payments to others.

Democrats should also pass narrowly drawn legislation to require inaugural committees to file detailed expenditure reports with the FEC. They should clear the cloud of suspicion around this inauguration and future inaugurations. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., has introduced the Inaugural Committee Transparency Act in Congress, which would require that there be a public record of where inaugural committee funds go.

Should Congress change hands, Democrats should do their constitutional duty to legislate and investigate. They should protect the integrity of the presidency by safeguarding the transfer of power and the swearing-in of a new commander-in-chief.

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