

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 26, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary
Department of Defense

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
Department of Interior

Dear Secretaries Esper and Bernhardt:

We write to express our serious concern about reports that President Trump plans to hold a second “Salute to America” for the upcoming Fourth of July holiday.¹ Given the current COVID-19 crisis, we believe such an event would needlessly risk the health and safety of thousands of Americans. Further, this event would come at the cost of millions of taxpayer dollars while we are facing an unprecedented economic downturn due to the pandemic.

The National Capital Region is currently experiencing some of the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders are in effect in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, with confirmed cases and deaths in many jurisdictions still on the rise. While we remain optimistic that these precautions, in addition to increased diagnostic and antibody testing capacity, will lead to decreased numbers in cases and deaths, it is likely that many businesses will remain closed and public gatherings will continue with restriction into the summer months.

Should the president continue with his plan to hold another “Salute to America” event, it would have detrimental impacts on not only those that live in the National Capital Region, but all those who travel in from other areas of the country to attend. Washington, DC is a popular travel destination for visitors to partake in Fourth of July festivities and last year’s “Salute to America” event attracted thousands of out-of-town visitors. If a similar gathering is planned this year, there is no doubt that it would exceed public gathering best practices and significantly increase the threat of community spread of COVID-19.

Given the number of individuals that would try to attend such an event, logistically such an event would be impossible to put on safely. Public transportation is limited in the region to essential business only, including the closure of seventeen metro stops. There is reduced parking around the Mall in order to dissuade public gatherings. Enforcing safe social distancing and basic event

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/us/politics/trump-lincoln-memorial.html>

protocol would put park, event security, and law enforcement officers at risk of contracting the virus, in addition to increasing use of personal protective equipment that still face supply limitations.

Last year, the Trump Administration spent over \$5.4 million to put on the “Salute to America” event.² Secretary Bernhardt reported that the Department of Interior pulled over \$2.45 million from its existing funds to help cover the costs, while the Department of Defense spent around \$1.2 million from its budget. With the catastrophic hit that our economy has taken due to the COVID-19 crisis, it is not only financially wasteful to plan a second “Salute to America” event, but has the potential to again inappropriately pull funds from necessary accounts already under economic strain. The Administration, including your agencies, should be focusing on helping American families, not on a vanity project for the president.

We urge you to immediately suspend any plans of such an event.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/
Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/
Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

² <https://apnews.com/9f6183e985d64171854416503a6faeff>

/s/
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress