

# Issue Brief

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## A Preliminary Assessment of the Costs of the 2021 Inauguration and the Ongoing Security Operation in Washington, D.C.

### Introduction

While a full accounting of inauguration and security costs is not yet possible, initial research suggests that taxpayers will be on the hook for at least \$665 million for the events of January 20th and the military lockdown of the District of Columbia.

In recent decades, inauguration day has featured large crowds, an extensive parade, and several balls throughout Washington, D.C. Because of the pandemic and social distancing restrictions, the events scheduled around the swearing in of a new president this year were scaled back compared to traditional inaugurations. Plans for this year were further upended after the attack on the Capitol building on January 6. Reports of additional threats surrounding inauguration day led to a military lock down of the District of Columbia. Over 26,000 National Guard troops were deployed in the capital from all fifty states, Washington, D.C., and three territories.

### Key Facts:



A full accounting of taxpayer funds in support of each presidential inauguration is not available, but based on current and previous budget information, agency spending related to this year's event cost at least \$73 million.



In addition, federal workers in the D.C. region were given an extra paid holiday on January 20, costing taxpayers at least \$109 million excluding the premium pay available to those who were still required to work.



This year's inauguration could be the most expensive, least attended in history after the riot at the Capitol building led to a massive National Guard presence. Preliminary estimates peg the cost at \$483 million but taxpayers could expect the price tag to ultimately rise.

With a smaller crowd this year, spending related to the event had been expected to be lower than previous inaugurations. A full accounting of these costs across all the agencies involved is not currently available, but some outlays can be identified amounting to at least \$73 million. On top of that, federal workers in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area are also provided a paid vacation day, costing taxpayers at least \$109 million.

The security situation likely made this the least attended and most expensive inauguration yet. According to a preliminary estimate from the Department of Defense, the security operation will total at least \$483 million, including the cost of maintaining 5,000 National Guard members in Washington, D.C. through mid-March. The cost per day will amount to \$7 million over this period. A significant portion of the cost is due to the decision to transport the National Guard from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The large military aircraft used to transport troops and equipment can cost from \$19,000 to \$23,000 per flight hour.

## Inaugural Costs

Normally, there are several inaugural balls and celebrations organized around January 20th. These are funded by donations raised through each president's private campaign committee. Taxpayer funds pay for the swearing-in ceremony and the related maintenance, construction, security, and cleanup.

Many different agencies are involved with security and crowd control. Some security spending for this year can be readily identified and is detailed below. However, a full accounting of the costs of inaugurations is difficult to determine because most of the agencies directly involved in inaugural activities do not always specify such spending as [line-items](#) in their budget requests and other documents.<sup>1</sup>

## Joint Congressional Committee

The Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC) was established in 1901 to organize and host inaugural events. The committee also distributes the tickets for the event. In past years, up to 200,000 tickets are issued, including bundles made available to members of Congress to distribute to their constituents. But this year attendance was [limited](#) to sitting Members of Congress and one guest each.<sup>2</sup> The FY 2020 consolidated appropriations provided [\\$1.5 million](#) for the JCCIC and the FY 2021 bill provided an additional [\\$2 million](#).<sup>3</sup>

## Inaugural Platform and Grounds

Beginning in the October before the inauguration, the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) starts constructing the inaugural platform on the west front steps of the Capitol building. The [structure](#) can hold over 1,600 people and additional bleachers can accommodate another 1,000 invited guests.<sup>4</sup> Despite the pandemic, the JCCIC made an early call to [plan](#) for a traditional inauguration, arguing that it would be easier to scale back later on than it would be to scale up.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2021). *Inauguration Security and Operations*. Retrieved from [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2020-12-23\\_IF11710\\_d7251d8dc221dd8c8931182e932a53b75338c463.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2020-12-23_IF11710_d7251d8dc221dd8c8931182e932a53b75338c463.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. (2020). "JCCIC Announces Attendance Guidelines for 59th Inaugural Ceremonies." Retrieved from [https://www.inaugural.senate.gov/press\\_release/jccic-announces-attendance-guidelines-for-59th-inaugural-ceremonies/](https://www.inaugural.senate.gov/press_release/jccic-announces-attendance-guidelines-for-59th-inaugural-ceremonies/).

<sup>3</sup> Public Law 116-94: Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ94/PLAW-116publ94.pdf>; and Public Law No: 116-260: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text/enr>.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. (2020). "Inaugural Platform." Retrieved from <https://www.inaugural.senate.gov/inaugural-platform/> (Accessed February 18, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Lesniewski, Niel and Tully-McManus, Katherine. "Biden or Trump, Inaugural Planning and Construction Well Underway on Capitol Hill." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. November 5, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-nation/2020/11/05/Biden-Trump-inaugural-planning-Capitol-Hill/stories/202011050129>.

In previous years, the AOC spent around [\\$4 million](#) to prepare the Capitol grounds for the event.<sup>6</sup> The [costs are expected to be higher](#) this year after the damage to the platform and the Capitol building on January 6.<sup>7</sup> In response to an inquiry from NTUF, the office of the AOC indicated that they do not yet have a preliminary estimate of the costs of repairs which will continue over the coming months.

## National Park Service

The National Parks Service (NPS) is responsible for most of the public land and monuments around the National Mall and also provides [support](#) for the inauguration.<sup>8</sup> It is also one of the few agencies that has specified inaugural-related funding set asides in budget documents. In past years, Congress provided [\\$2 million](#) to the NPS for inaugural-related activities.<sup>9</sup> The FY 2021 budget proposal requested [\\$4.2 million](#) to “support visitor orientation and safety services during the 2021 Presidential inauguration.”<sup>10</sup> Congress appropriated [\\$2.69 billion](#) to NPS for 2021 (up from [\\$2.58 billion](#) in 2020) but did not specify an amount that would be dedicated to inaugural activities.<sup>11</sup>

## Secret Service

The Department of Homeland Security designates inaugurations as a National Special Security Event (NSSE) which means that [additional accounts](#) can be used for unanticipated inaugural spending, but these outlays are not necessarily identified in accounting reports as being for inaugural activities.<sup>12</sup>

The United States Secret Service (USSS) takes the lead on NSSEs and coordinates with the local police departments in the Washington metropolitan area in preparation for inaugurations. The agency’s FY 2021 budget request did not specify its expected costs surrounding the inauguration. Congress appropriated [\\$2.37 billion](#) for USSS operations and support for FY 2021 (up from [\\$2.34 billion](#) in FY 2020).<sup>13</sup> Since 2014, Congress has appropriated [\\$5 million](#) per year for all NSSEs (which include inaugurations, presidential nominating conventions, international summits in the U.S., and major sporting events like the Super Bowl).<sup>14</sup>

## Washington, D.C. Security Funding

So far, Congress provided a total of \$34.9 million to D.C. for inaugural costs. A continuing appropriations bill enacted last October provided [\\$13 million](#) to the District of Columbia for security and planning costs related to the inauguration.<sup>15</sup> The FY 2021 omnibus spending bill passed in December provided a total of \$38.4 million to Washington, D.C. for “the costs of providing public safety at events related to the presence of the National Capital” including support for the Secret Service as needed. Of that amount, [\\$21.9 million](#) was set aside for costs related to the inauguration.<sup>16</sup> In 2017, for comparison, Congress appropriated \$19.99 million to DC for the 2017 inauguration-related planning and security.

<sup>6</sup> Crane-Hirsch, Audrey Celeste. *The Presidential Inauguration: Basic Facts and Information*. Congressional Research Service. January 9, 2013. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42891.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Brady, Demian. “Breach of Congress Could Put Taxpayers on the Hook for Costly Repairs and Security Enhancements.” National Taxpayers Union Foundation, January 7, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.ntu.org/foundation/detail/breach-of-congress-could-put-taxpayers-on-the-hook-for-costly-repairs-and-security-enhancements>.

<sup>8</sup> National Park Service. (2021). “Making It Happen: Hosting Presidential Inaugurations.” Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/inauguration/making-it-happen.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Crane-Hirsch, Audrey Celeste. *The Presidential Inauguration: Basic Facts and Information*. Congressional Research Service. January 9, 2013. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42891.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> National Park Service. (2020). *FY 2021 Interior Budget in Brief*. Retrieved from <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2021-bib-bh081.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Public Law No: 116-260: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text/enr>. Congressional Research Service. (2021). *National Park Service: FY2021 Appropriations*. Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11661>.

<sup>12</sup> Crane-Hirsch, Audrey Celeste. *The Presidential Inauguration: Basic Facts and Information*. Congressional Research Service. January 9, 2013. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42891.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Public Law No: 116-260: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text/enr>.

Public Law 116-93: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ93/PLAW-116publ93.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2021). *National Special Security Events: Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R43522.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Public Law 116-159: Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ159/PLAW-116publ159.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Public Law No: 116-260: Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text/enr>.

## Department of Defense

The Department of Defense also plays a role in the inauguration, including military ceremonial support and participation in the inaugural parade. The Congressional Research Service reported a cost of [\\$21.6 million](#) in 2009 for military personnel, operation and maintenance, and procurement.<sup>17</sup> The costs related to subsequent inaugurations are currently unavailable. If money was provided for the 2021 inauguration equivalent to the 2009 funding level, the cost would be \$26.7 million in inflation-adjusted dollars.

## Holiday Pay for D.C.-area Federal Workers

The day of the inauguration is a federal holiday for certain qualified workers in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, giving them an extra day off with pay while some get a premium bonus. According to *Government Executive* the eligible area [encompasses](#) “employees within 125 miles or a 2.5-hour commute of Washington.”<sup>18</sup> Federal workers from somewhere else who were scheduled to work in the D.C. region on January 20 were also eligible for the holiday, but any regional employees who traveled outside of the D.C. region on that day were not eligible. Federal employees who were required to work in the D.C. area were eligible for premium holiday pay which doubles the worker’s salary for the day.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) did not reply to an inquiry from NTUF regarding the costs of providing the day of paid leave and the premium pay to the eligible federal workers. However, an estimate can be arrived at from available OPM data regarding federal civilian employment levels and payroll totals. During 2021, there will be 250 working days and there are ten national federal holidays. The cost per day of the federal civilian workforce (excluding the Postal Service) is \$858 million.

According to 2018 data from the *Washington Post*, there were approximately [284,000](#) federal employees in the D.C. area, pegging the cost for the inaugural holiday at a minimum of \$109 million.<sup>19</sup> This *excludes* the additional cost of premium pay for federal employees who were still required to work in D.C. on January 20. Costs could be mitigated to the extent that federal buildings’ operations and utility costs were reduced during the closure, but this is difficult to quantify.

## Costs of the National Guard Deployment

U.S. taxpayers pay the cost when the federal government activates the National Guard. Members of the Guard who are activated for more than 30 consecutive days also become [eligible](#) for federal health benefits in the TRICARE program.<sup>20</sup>

On February 4, *Bloomberg News* reported that the cost of the National Guard operation will be at least [\\$483 million](#) from January 6, through peak deployment of upwards of 26,000 during the inaugural week, and for maintaining a 5,000 strong National Guard presence in D.C. through mid-March.<sup>21</sup> The estimate was obtained from a spokesperson for the Department of Defense. Additional coverage by the *Military Times* [reported](#) that the cost “includes the costs of transporting Guard troops from their states to Washington, their salaries and benefits, as well as housing and other essentials.”<sup>22</sup> At this rate, the costs will amount to \$7 million per day for the period.

<sup>17</sup> Crane-Hirsch, Audrey Celeste. *The Presidential Inauguration: Basic Facts and Information*. Congressional Research Service. January 9, 2013. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42891.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Katz, Eric, “Inauguration a Holiday for D.C.-Area Feds, Even Those Teleworking Due to COVID-19.” *Government Executive*. December 17, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/2020/12/inauguration-holiday-dc-area-feds-even-those-teleworking-due-covid-19/170852/>.

<sup>19</sup> Cameron, Darla et al. “Where Do Federal Workers Live?” *The Washington Post*, August 20, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/politics/federal-workers/>.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Defense Military OneSource. (2020). “A Benefits Guide for National Guard and Family Members.” Retrieved from <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/national-guard/national-guard-family-program/benefits-guide/>.

<sup>21</sup> Capaccio, Anthony. “National Guard’s Post-Riot Deployment Cost at Least \$480 Million,” *Bloomberg News*. February 4, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-04/national-guard-s-post-riot-deployment-cost-at-least-480-million>. The author later further clarified on Twitter that the estimate was about \$483 million. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-04/national-guard-s-post-riot-deployment-cost-at-least-480-million>.

<sup>22</sup> Baldor, Lolita. “National Guard Deployment to Secure DC Will Cost Nearly \$500 Million.” *Military Times*. February 5, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/02/05/national-guard-deployment-to-secure-dc-will-cost-nearly-500-million/>.

## Costs Could Run Higher than the Preliminary Projection

For a week last June after protests about the death of George Floyd, about 5,000 National Guard troops were activated to secure governmental buildings in South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington State, Wisconsin and Washington, D.C. *The Daily Beast* [reported](#) that the deployment cost taxpayers \$21.1 million, included \$18.9 million for pay and allowance, and \$2.9 million for operations and management, which includes local transportation and lodging.<sup>23</sup> These figures do not include the cost of aircraft used to transport the National Guard to and from D.C.

At that rate, it cost \$603 per Guard troop per day for the mission. With an estimated 26,000 National Guard troops at peak deployment in D.C. on January 20, the cost to taxpayers for that day amounted to at least \$15.7 million. Owing to the larger scale of the operation, the January deployment also required more maintenance and costs for the construction of barriers, fencing, and traffic points.

Compared to the smaller contingent activated last year, the cost for lodging was likely greater around the inaugural week. For example, this January, a local D.C. news service [reported](#) that at least 120 National Guard were seen checking in at Hyatt Place Washington D.C./National Mall. Rooms there are currently available for \$149 per night.<sup>24</sup> Some National Guard were even [spotted](#) at the Watergate Hotel, where rooms run from \$200 to \$400 for a night.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside these reports, however, are numerous stories documenting the deplorable makeshift accommodations many National Guard troops faced while [stationed](#) in the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center.<sup>26</sup> Others had lodged in the Dirksen Senate Office building until they were [vacated](#) to a parking garage “with just one electrical outlet, and one bathroom with two stalls for 5,000 troops.”<sup>27</sup>

Costs to taxpayers could [extend](#) past the deployment in D.C. because the mobilization periods include days for processing and for quarantining for a 2-week period after returning home.<sup>28</sup> It is unclear whether this factor was included in the preliminary cost estimate.

The transport costs will also be significantly higher compared to last June’s mission because of the increased number of National Guard troops flown into D.C. According to a National Guard [press release](#), over a four-day period from January 12 – 15, “Some 125 Air National Guard aircraft flew 134 sorties into Washington Jan. 12-15, bringing more than 7,060 National Guard troops and 2.3 million pounds of cargo from around the nation.”<sup>29</sup>

A significant factor of the higher costs incurred to taxpayers flowed from the decision to deploy troops from all 54 components of the National Guard, including each state, the District of Columbia, and three territories. This call necessitated air transport from far afield on military aircraft with expensive operating and maintenance costs. For example:

<sup>23</sup> Banco, Erin. “Trump’s Deployment of National Guard to Deal With D.C. Protests Cost Taxpayers \$21 Million.” *The Daily Beast*. June 13, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trumps-deployment-of-national-guard-to-deal-with-dc-protests-cost-taxpayers-dollar21-million>.

<sup>24</sup> Torres, Matthew. “Hotels See Bump in Bookings as National Guard Troops Deploy to DC.” *WUSA 9*. Retrieved from <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/national/capitol-riots/visitors-canceling-reservations-as-troops-move-in-for-inauguration/65-0b843482-7041-4274-96e9-725ad17b0a68>. Hotel room price as listed on February 7, 2021 via Google’s search engine.

<sup>25</sup> Leiby, Richard. “176 Hotels, 247 Military Flights: How the National Guard Transported, Fed, and Housed Soldiers Who Came to D.C. for the Inauguration.” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2021. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/national-guard-transported-fed-housed-soldiers-for-inauguration/2021/01/29/49111ff6-601f-11eb-afbe-9a11a127d146\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/national-guard-transported-fed-housed-soldiers-for-inauguration/2021/01/29/49111ff6-601f-11eb-afbe-9a11a127d146_story.html).

<sup>26</sup> ABC Action News. “National Guard Troops Sleep in Capitol Visitor Center after 15,000 Deployed to D.C.” January 13, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.abcactionnews.com/decodedc/politics/national-guard-troops-sleep-in-capitol-visitor-center-after-15-000-deployed-to-d-c>.

<sup>27</sup> Seligman, Lara et al. “‘We Feel Incredibly Betrayed’: Thousands of Guardsmen Forced to Vacate Capitol.” *Politico*. January 21, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/21/national-guard-troops-vacate-capitol-461220>.

<sup>28</sup> Cole, William. “Hawaii National Guard Returning from D.C. to Quarantine for 14 days; on Duty for 31 Days Total.” *Honolulu Star Advertiser*. January 25, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2021/01/25/breaking-news/hawaii-national-guard-returning-from-d-c-to-quarantine-for-14-days-on-duty-for-31-days-total/>.

<sup>29</sup> National Guard Bureau. “Historic Air National Guard Airlift Brings Troops to DC.” January 16, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2474693/historic-air-national-guard-airlift-brings-troops-to-dc/>.

- Alaska sent 80 Guards, most of whom were [transported](#) on a KC-135 Stratotanker for a 7-hour flight to Andrews Airforce Base.<sup>30</sup> At an estimated [\\$19,000](#) cost per flight hour for the KC-135, the roundtrip transport cost \$266,000.<sup>31</sup>
- Hawaii deployed [200](#) Guards and used [three](#) KC-135 refueling tankers and one C-17 cargo (which has a cost per flight hour of [\\$23,811](#)) to transport the troops and equipment cost for the round trip nearly 18 hour flights cost \$1.45 million.<sup>32</sup>
- Up to 40 Guards were initially deployed in at least two [waves](#) from [Guam](#), a distance of 7,900 miles from D.C.<sup>33</sup> It is unclear what type of aircraft was used. If a KC-135 was used to transport them from Guam to Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California, the cost for the 12-hour one-way flight would be \$228,000. Most of those troops will return home, while some will remain for an extended deployment and be joined by a new, smaller group of Guam Guards that are expected to be [deployed soon](#).<sup>34</sup>
- At least 200 National Guard members from Puerto Rico were [flown](#) to Washington, D.C. aboard a C-17 Globemaster III stationed with the 145th Airlift Wing in Charlotte Air National Guard Base, North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> Round trip from Charlotte to Puerto Rico to D.C. and back (roughly 13 hours) would cost nearly \$310,000.

## Conclusion

While the events of an inauguration always entail significant costs, the decisions related to the unique security situation in 2021 has caused costs to balloon dramatically. The ongoing military lockdown of Washington, D.C. is a costly result of the disastrous events of January 6th.

## About the Author

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<sup>30</sup> Krakow, Morgan. "Members of the Alaska National Guard Heading to Washington to Help with Inauguration." Anchorage Daily News. January 15, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/military/2021/01/16/members-of-the-alaska-national-guard-headed-to-washington-ahead-of-inauguration/>.

<sup>31</sup> Welch, Stewart and Leroy, David. "The Case for a Three-Tanker Air Force." War on the Rocks. October 11, 2019. Retrieved from <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/the-case-for-a-three-tanker-air-force/>.

<sup>32</sup> Cole, William. "200 Hawaii National Guard Members Deploying to D.C. for Inauguration Duty." *Honolulu Star Advertiser*. January 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2021/01/14/breaking-news/200-hawaii-national-guard-members-deploying-to-washington-d-c-for-inauguration-duty>.

Ritsick, Colin. "C-17 Facts: Everything You Need To Know." Military Machine. January 15, 2020. Retrieved from <https://militarymachine.com/c-17-facts>.

<sup>33</sup> *Pacific Daily News*. "Five more Guam National Guard members head to Washington, D.C." January 18, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2021/01/17/guam-national-guard-washington-dc-biden-inauguration-day/4201275001/>.

National Guard Bureau. "National Guard Troops Head to DC from as Far Away as Guam." January 17, 2020. Retrieved from [https://www.army.mil/article/242482/national\\_guard\\_troops\\_head\\_to\\_dc\\_from\\_as\\_far\\_away\\_as\\_guam](https://www.army.mil/article/242482/national_guard_troops_head_to_dc_from_as_far_away_as_guam).

<sup>34</sup> Pacific News Center. "Guam Guard May Extend Presence in Nation's Capital." January 31, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.pncguam.com/guam-guard-may-extend-presence-in-nations-capital/>.

<sup>35</sup> National Guard Bureau. "Historic Air National Guard Airlift Brings Troops to DC." January 16, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2474693/historic-air-national-guard-airlift-brings-troops-to-dc/>.



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