



October 2016

PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL

Estimated Costs for a Specific Presidential Trip to Illinois and Florida

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-24](#), a report to the Honorable John Barrasso, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

According to White House officials, to be able to communicate instantly with the U.S. military, the President flies on military aircraft whenever he travels—whether for official, political, or other non-official reasons. On February 15, 2013, the President flew from Joint Base Andrews in Maryland to Chicago, Illinois to deliver remarks on economic proposals that he introduced in his State of the Union address on February 12, 2013, later flew to Palm Beach, Florida for vacation, and then returned to Joint Base Andrews.

GAO was asked to identify the costs associated with the President's February 15, 2013 through February 18, 2013, travel to Illinois and Florida. This review was conducted in response to a request from Senator Barrasso, then Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. This report provides information on the major costs incurred by DOD and DHS in supporting the President's February 2013 trip to Illinois and Florida.

GAO examined cost data from DOD and DHS on aircraft operating costs, per diem expenses, and other significant costs. Additionally, GAO interviewed knowledgeable officials from the White House, DOD, and DHS who were involved in supporting presidential travel. GAO also examined relevant guidance.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report.

View [GAO-17-24](#). For more information, contact Brian Lepore, 202-512-4523, leporeb@gao.gov

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PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL

Estimated Costs for a Specific Presidential Trip to Illinois and Florida

What GAO Found

GAO estimated that the major costs incurred by the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the President's travel to Chicago, Illinois, and Palm Beach, Florida, from February 15, 2013, through February 18, 2013, were about \$3.6 million, of which about \$2.8 million in costs were incurred by DOD and \$0.77 million by DHS (specifically, the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Secret Service). These costs consisted of the (1) operating expenses of the President's aircraft, supporting aircraft, and U.S. Coast Guard small boats; and (2) travel expenses, which include per diem (lodging and meals), commercial airfare, and rental cars for DOD and DHS personnel supporting the trip. They exclude certain classified DOD costs, and the salaries and benefits of U.S. government civilian and military personnel traveling with the President or involved with agency travel preparations since these personnel would have received their salaries and benefits for the conduct of their regular duties and responsibilities regardless of whether the President traveled. The table highlights the estimated major costs associated with the President's February 2013 trip.

Estimated Major Costs Associated with the President's February 15 – 18, 2013 Trip to Illinois and Florida (Dollars in thousands)

	Cost of Government Aircraft/Boats Used	Per Diem and other related expenses ^a	Total
Department of Defense	\$2,763.2	\$76	\$2,839.2
Department of Homeland Security	\$438.3	\$328.3	\$766.7

Source: GAO Analysis of DOD and DHS Data | GAO-17-24

Note: Per diem includes lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. This table excludes classified costs, and the salaries and benefits of U.S. government personnel traveling with the President or involved with travel preparations. Costs are in 2013 dollars. Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

^aOther related expenses includes commercial airfares.

Figure 1: The U.S. Air Force VC-25A ("Air Force One")



Source: The White House. | GAO-17-24

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October 11, 2016

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate

Dear Senator Barrasso:

The President of the United States must be ready to travel anywhere in the world on a moment's notice. According to White House officials, to be able to communicate instantly with the U.S. military, the President flies on military aircraft on all trips, regardless of the type of travel: official, political, or other non-official purposes. The use of military aircraft, provided by the Department of Defense (DOD), to support presidential travel began with President Franklin Roosevelt. During President Dwight Eisenhower's administration the presidential helicopter, commonly referred to as "Marine One," was added to support the President. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy became the first President to fly in a jet built specifically for the use of the President. DOD continues to provide military aircraft to safely and securely transport the President today.

Presidential protection is generally the responsibility of the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service). At the request of the Secret Service, assistance may be provided by other agencies such as DOD and the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard). Since the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, the Secret Service has been the primary federal law enforcement agency to provide protection to the President. According to Secret Service officials, in order to ensure the protection of the President, Secret Service agents travel with the President at all times and travel in advance of the President to perform security sweeps and prepare locations for the President's arrival. Additionally, according to officials from DOD and the Coast Guard, when requested, DOD and the Coast Guard may provide assistance to the Secret Service by providing waterside security zones, explosive detection, or other specialized capabilities. Both the Secret Service and the Coast Guard reside within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

You requested that we examine DOD's and DHS's (Secret Service and Coast Guard) costs associated with the President's February 15, 2013,

through February 18, 2013 travel to Illinois and Florida.¹ On February 15, 2013, the President flew from Joint Base Andrews in Maryland to Chicago, Illinois. The President delivered remarks at Hyde Park Academy and discussed economic proposals introduced in the State of the Union address given on February 12, 2013. Afterwards, the President flew from Chicago to Palm Beach, Florida, before returning to Joint Base Andrews on February 18, 2013.² No public events were scheduled while the President was in Florida; White House officials stated the President was on vacation during this time. This report provides information on the major costs incurred by DOD and DHS for the President's February 15, 2013, through February 18, 2013, travel.

To estimate the major costs of the February 15, 2013 through February 18, 2013 trip, we collected data from DOD organizations including: the Air Force's 89th Airlift Wing at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland; the Marine Corps' Helicopter Squadron One at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; and the Air Mobility Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and DOD's Military Working Dog Program—all of which provided support for the President's trip. We also collected data from the Secret Service and the U.S. Coast Guard. These data include fiscal year 2013 aircraft and boat-related operating expenses and travel expenses—including commercial air travel and per diem expenses (such as food and lodging) and rental cars for DOD, the Secret Service, and Coast Guard personnel supporting the trip. We calculated aircraft-related operating expenses for the President's 2013 trip by using the estimated cost per flight hour and the actual flight hours for each specific aircraft type as reported to us by the Air Force and Marine Corps to estimate the total cost per aircraft involved. We obtained the estimated cost per flight hour rate from the Air Force and Marine Corps.³ We did not include other costs such as salaries and benefits of civilian personnel, such as Secret Service Agents, or military personnel traveling with the President or involved in the agency

¹This review was conducted in response to a request from Senator Barrasso, then Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

²February 18, 2013 was President's Day.

³The cost per flight hour is calculated for the aircraft type annually and is based on the total operational, maintenance, training, and fuel costs of the aircraft type averaged over the number of flight hours the aircraft type flew the previous year.

planning because these personnel would still have received their salaries and benefits as part of their regular duties and responsibilities regardless of whether the President travels. We estimated the major costs for the entire February 15, 2013 through February 18, 2013 trip and did not obtain information on the apportionment of the costs between time spent on official or non-official activities. We assessed the reliability of data by interviewing knowledgeable officials about the data's accuracy and completeness and determined it to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of providing information about the major travel-related costs for this 2013 trip. This report does not include certain cost information from DOD that is classified.

We also reviewed Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel memorandum opinions related to presidential travel and certain federal travel regulations. A brief discussion of this guidance can be found in appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from February 2015 to October 2016, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

DOD, through the Air Force Air Mobility Command's 89th Airlift Wing and Presidential Airlift Group, provides global passenger airlift, logistics, and aerial support and communications to the President, and other senior elected officials and military leaders. In addition to the Air Force, the Marine Corps provides airlift assistance through the Marine Helicopter Squadron One. The White House Military Office, located on the White House grounds, provides military support for presidential travel, among other functions, and is the central hub for multiple affiliated units that support presidential travel.

DOD, through the Air Force Air Mobility Command's 89th Airlift Wing and Presidential Airlift Group, operates the VC-25A, a Boeing 747-200B aircraft commonly referred to as "Air Force One" when the President

travels on it. In addition, the 89th Airlift Wing operates several other aircraft that can be used by the President,⁴ other U.S. government officials, and distinguished visitors such as foreign heads of state. Figure 1 shows the aircraft commonly known as “Air Force One.”

Figure 1: The U.S. Air Force VC-25A (“Air Force One”)



Source: The White House. | GAO-17-24

The 89th Airlift Wing’s parent command, Air Mobility Command, provides aircraft to move cargo in support of presidential travel.⁵ Depending on the specifics of the trip, aircraft used could include the C-17 Globemaster, C-5 Super Galaxy, and the C-130 Hercules; these aircraft would be used to transport helicopters, the Presidential limousine and other motorcade vehicles, and other necessary equipment. Air Mobility Command might also provide refueling aircraft such as the KC-10 Extender and the KC-135 Stratotanker. Figure 2 shows these types of aircraft.

⁴Any aircraft carrying the President is designated “Air Force One.”

⁵Air Mobility Command aircraft also provide airlift support to military missions worldwide.

Figure 2: The Various U.S. Air Force Aircraft Used to Support Presidential Airlift



C-5 Super Galaxy

Source: U.S. Air Force. | GAO-17-24



KC-135R Stratotanker



C-17 Globemaster



KC-10 Extender



C-130H Hercules

In addition to the Air Force, the Marine Corps provides assistance through Marine Helicopter Squadron One. The squadron provides helicopter lift and contingency support to the President wherever and whenever he travels, operating the VH-3D, the VH-60N, and the MV-22B aircraft. Figure 3 shows these aircraft.

Figure 3: The Various U.S. Marine Corps Aircraft that Have Been Used to Support Presidential Airlift



CH-46E



MV-22 Osprey



VH-3D



VH-60N

Source: Department of Defense, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Marine Corps. | GAO-17-24

Note: Department of Defense officials stated that the CH-46E was replaced by the MV-22 in 2015. However, the CH-46E was used to support the President's February 2013 trip.

In addition to providing transport for the President, DOD—along with other agencies—provides protection. For example, Marine Corps Helicopter Squadron One's organizational structure includes elements necessary to coordinate with the White House Military Office and meet the unique security requirements of presidential travel, such as arriving in advance of the President to perform security sweeps and brief support personnel. In addition, the DOD Military Working Dog Program provides explosive detection capabilities—along with explosive ordnance disposal personnel—and performs patrol functions during the President's trips. While the executive agent for the DOD Military Working Dog program is the Secretary of the Air Force, Military Working Dog teams can be assigned to support the President from any of the military services.

Presidential protection is generally the responsibility of the Secret Service. In addition, the Coast Guard may, when so requested by proper authority, utilize its personnel and facilities to assist any federal agency,

state, territory, or the District of Columbia to perform any activity for which such personnel and facilities are especially qualified.⁶ The Coast Guard provides additional protection for the President when the Secret Service requests it. Typically, according to the Coast Guard, it provides waterside security zones, aircraft support, explosive detection, or other specialized capabilities in support of these requests. Figure 4 shows the types of Coast Guard aircraft and boats used to provide waterside security zones.

Figure 4: Types of U.S. Coast Guard Assets Used for Presidential Security



HH-65



RB-S

Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-17-24

Major Costs for the President's Travel to Illinois and Florida from February 15, 2013, through February 18, 2013, Were about \$3.6 Million, Excluding Classified Costs

Presidential travel requires support from DOD and DHS. For the President's trip to Illinois and Florida, we estimated that the two departments incurred costs of about \$3.6 million, of which approximately \$2.8 million was incurred by DOD and \$0.77 million was incurred by DHS.⁷ These costs do not include certain cost information from DOD that is classified. Moreover, as we examined the major costs incurred for the President's travel, we did not include the salaries and benefits of U.S. government civilian and military personnel traveling with the President or involved with agency travel preparations, since these personnel would have received their salaries and benefits for the conduct of their regular duties and responsibilities regardless of whether the President traveled. The cost per flying hour for military aircraft is a significant cost driver that affects the overall costs of any presidential travel and these costs are predominately borne by the Air Force and the Marine Corps, because

⁶14 U.S.C. § 141(a).

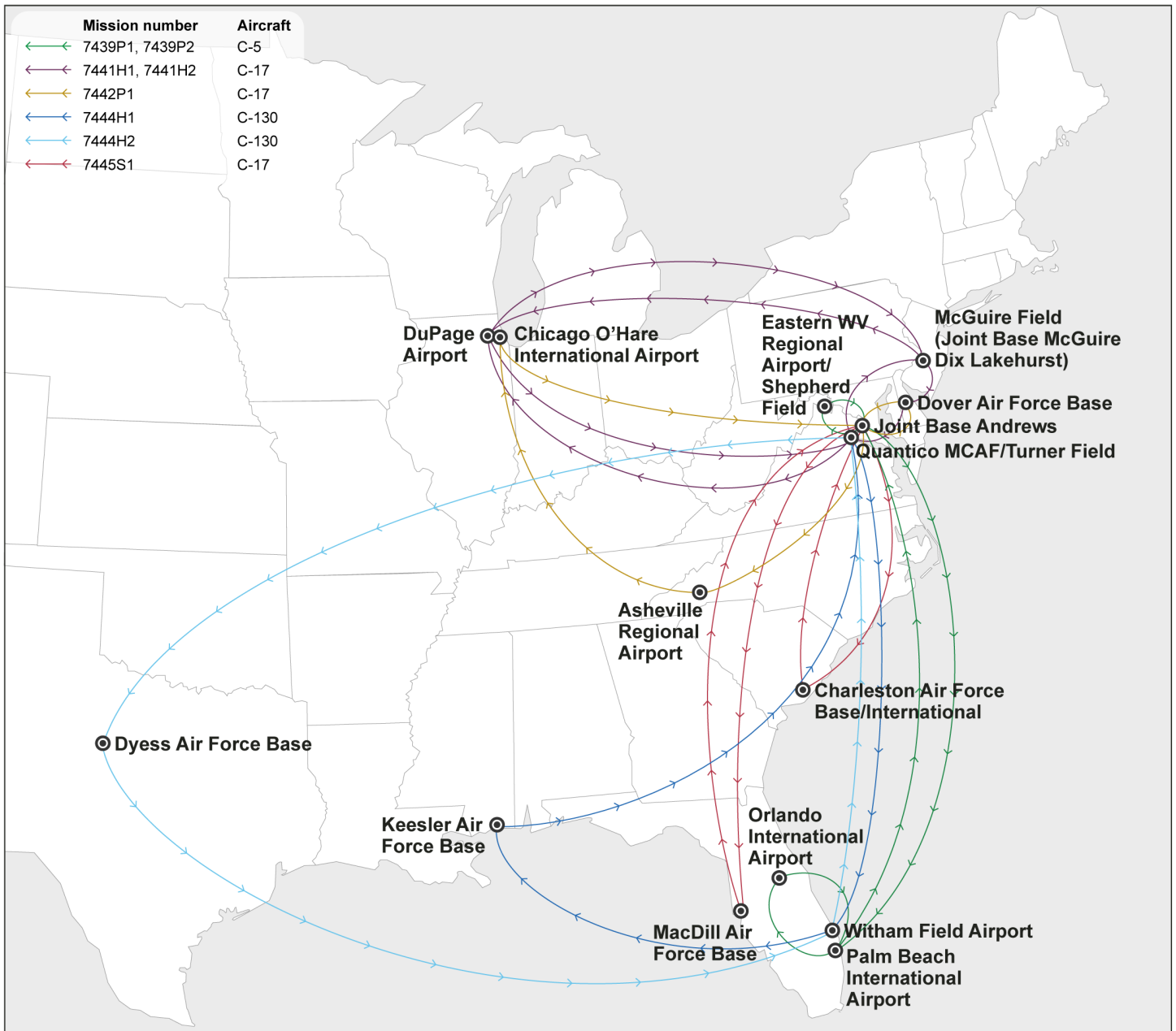
⁷In fiscal year 2013 dollars.

they operate the aircraft utilized by the President. Further, the Secret Service incurs additional travel-related expenses as a result of traveling with the President for functions such as sending advance teams and security preparation.

For this particular presidential trip, aircraft—including the C-17 Globemaster and the C-5 Super Galaxy—departed various U.S. Air Force bases and arrived at Joint Base Andrews or Marine Corps Base Quantico to transport Secret Service personnel and vehicles and Marine Corps personnel and helicopters to support the trip before returning to their air bases of origin.⁸ Figure 5 illustrates the supporting airlift that DOD provided specifically for the President’s February 2013 trip to Illinois and Florida. This figure excludes the flight routes of “Air Force One” and “Marine One.”

⁸Refueling aircraft such as the KC-10 and KC-135R were not assigned to support the February 2013 presidential trip.

Figure 5: Notional Routes from Point of Departure of Department of Defense Aircraft Used for the President’s February 2013 Trip to Illinois and Florida



Source: GAO analysis of Air Mobility Command mission data. | GAO-17-24

Note: Routes depicted in this graphic are for illustrative purposes and do not present the actual flight path of the aircraft or the actual distances flown.

Major Costs Incurred by DOD

For the President’s February 2013 trip, we estimated that DOD spent about \$2.8 million, excluding classified costs, for the use of the VC-25A aircraft (Air Force One), helicopter lift provided by the Marine Corps, associated logistical support (including the C-5 and C-17) provided by the Air Mobility Command and other travel related costs—such as per diem and lodging costs for those traveling in advance, or in support of, the President.⁹ In addition, the Army and Navy provided Military Working Dog teams to provide explosive detection capabilities and perform patrol functions. Table 1 provides information on the estimated DOD costs associated with this trip.

Table 1: Estimated Aircraft and Other Travel Related Costs Incurred by the Department of Defense (DOD) in Support of the President’s February 2013 Trip to Illinois and Florida

Dollars in thousands

	Cost of Aircraft Used ^a	Per Diem and other related expenses ^b	Total
Air Mobility Command	\$986.7	N/A	\$986.7
89th Airlift Wing	\$1,346.9	\$24.2	\$1,371.1
U.S. Marine Corps	\$429.7	\$46.9	\$476.6
Military Working Dog Program	N/A	\$4.9	\$4.9
Total			\$2,839.2

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data. | GAO-17-24

Notes: Per Diem and other related expenses were provided by DOD. Costs are in fiscal year 2013 dollars. Excludes classified information. Personnel salaries and benefits are not included in these figures since they would have been paid regardless of whether the President traveled. Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

^aWe calculated aircraft-related operating expenses by using the cost per flight hour and the actual flight hours for each specific aircraft type as reported to us by the Air Force and the Marine Corps to estimate the total cost per aircraft involved.

^bPer diem includes lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. Other related expenses include rental cars.

Major Costs Incurred by DHS

DHS spent an estimated \$767,000 to provide support for the President’s February 2013 trip. Of this figure, the Secret Service spent about \$180,000 to provide support. This included per diem and other related

⁹Table 1 excludes the salaries and benefits of personnel traveling with or making travel preparations for the trip since those salaries and benefits would have been paid regardless of whether the President traveled.

travel expenses, such as commercial airfare or use of rental cars for officials traveling in advance of the President.¹⁰ The Coast Guard spent about \$586,000 to provide support. Specifically, this trip included the use of the RB-S boat and HH-65 Dolphin helicopter to provide support in waterways, in addition to other travel-related costs such as per diem and lodging for officials on temporary duty assignment to support the President's travel. Table 2 shows the estimated major costs incurred by the Secret Service and Coast Guard for this trip.

Table 2: Estimated Major Costs Incurred by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in Support of the President's February 2013 Trip to Illinois and Florida

Dollars in thousands

	Cost of Coast Guard Assets Used	Commercial Air Travel	Per Diem and other related expenses ^a	Total
Secret Service	N/A	\$30.2	\$150.2	\$180.3
Coast Guard	\$438.3	N/A	\$148.0	\$586.3
Total				\$766.7

Source: GAO summary of DHS data. | GAO-17-24

Notes: Per Diem and other related expenses were provided by the Secret Service and the Coast Guard. Costs are in fiscal year 2013 dollars. Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

^aPer diem includes lodging, meals, and incidental expenses for officials on temporary duty assignment during the President's travel. Other related expenses include rental cars. Personnel salaries and benefits are not included in these figures since those salaries and benefits would have been paid regardless of whether the President traveled.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Executive Office of the President, DOD, and DHS for review and comment. They did not provide formal comments. Technical comments were provided by DOD and incorporated as appropriate.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Secretary of Homeland

¹⁰Table 2 excludes the salaries and benefits of U.S. government personnel traveling with the President or involved with travel preparations since those salaries and benefits would have been paid regardless of whether the President traveled.

Security, the Director of the Secret Service; the Commandant of the Coast Guard; the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lepore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and the last name "Lepore" clearly distinguishable.

Brian J. Lepore
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Presidential Travel Expenses Are Generally Discussed in Office of Legal Counsel Memorandums

Guidance governing executive agencies' use of government aircraft generally does not apply to aircraft in use by or in support of the President; however, memorandum opinions to the White House from the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel provide guidance for categorizing expenses associated with official, political, and personal travel by the President or Vice President.¹ According to an official in the Executive Office of the President, these memorandum opinions are intended to be general guides for White House staffs' decision-making about categorizing travel as for official, political, or other non-official purposes. They do not constitute procedures for planning and executing presidential travel. Given the unique functions and needs of the President, guidance governing executive agencies' use of government aircraft generally does not apply to government aircraft in use by or in support of the President. For example, OMB Circular A-126 prescribes policies to be followed by executive agencies in acquiring, managing, using, accounting for the costs of, and disposing of aircraft owned, leased, chartered, and rented by the federal government. However, the OMB Circular does not apply to aircraft while in use by or in support of the President or Vice President.² By extension, DOD instructions and directives that implement this guidance either do not discuss travel in support of the President or specifically exclude Presidential Airlift Group aircraft assigned to the 89th Airlift Wing and Marine Corps aircraft assigned to Marine Helicopter Squadron One in support of Presidential airlift missions.³

While the relevant memorandum opinions date back to previous administrations, an official in the Executive Office of the President confirmed during the course of our review that the underlying principles remain the same. The memorandum opinions provide general guidelines

¹See, e.g., White House Communications Agency Expenses Incurred on Political or Personal Travel by the President, 14 Op. Off. Legal Counsel 144 (1990); Payment of Expenses Associated with Travel by the President and Vice President, 6 Op. Off. Legal Counsel 214 (1982).

²See Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-126, *Improving the Management and Use of Government Aircraft*, para. 4 (May 22, 1992).

³See generally Department of Defense Directive 4500.56, *DOD Policy on the Use of Government Aircraft and Air Travel* (Apr. 14, 2009) (incorporating change June 24, 2014); see Department of Defense Instruction 4500.43, *Operational Support Airlift (OSA)*, para. 2.b(1) (May 18, 2011) (incorporating change June 26, 2013).

to be applied on a case-by-case basis by officials familiar with the facts of the trip.⁴

- 1982 Memorandum Opinion – This memorandum opinion provides guidelines for payment of expenses associated with travel by the President or Vice President. This memorandum addresses the allocation and payment of costs associated with such travel—whether it is official, political, or a mix of the two.⁵ The memorandum notes the mixed character of much presidential and vice presidential travel and the necessity of determination on a case-by-case basis by those most familiar with the facts whether an expense is official or political in character. It notes that, as a general rule, presidential and vice presidential travel should be considered “political” if its primary purpose involves their positions as leaders of their political party. Examples include party functions, fundraising, and campaigning for specific candidates. By contrast, travel to present, explain, and secure public support for the Administration’s measures are identified as an inherent part of the President’s and Vice President’s official duties. Examples could include inspections, meetings, and addresses.

In addition to considering the nature of the event involved, the memorandum indicates that the nature of the individuals involved must also be assessed. The memorandum notes that there are certain personnel whose official duties require them to be with the President, whether or not the President himself is on official business—such as the President’s doctor, military aides, and Secret Service agents. The memorandum provides that expenses incurred by these personnel should be considered official regardless of the character of the event. Expenses of individuals who are on a trip for purely political reasons should normally be considered political. For other personnel not necessarily serving in either a wholly official or wholly political capacity, determining whether expenses should be paid from appropriated funds or reimbursed, for example, by a political committee, generally depends on the nature of the travel.

⁴A White House official noted that in some instances, such as during a presidential election campaign, Federal Election Commission rules may also be relevant in the case of travel for political events.

⁵See Payment of Expenses Associated with Travel by the President and Vice President, 6 Op. Off. Legal Counsel 214 (1982).

For personnel in the last category, in the case of trips where both official and political activities occur, the memorandum indicates that the allocation of costs should be a good faith attempt to apportion the costs based on a reasonable division between the time spent on political activities and the time spent on official activities. For example, if 50 percent of a single day's events are political and 50 percent are official, those costs would be apportioned between reimbursement by a political committee and appropriated funds, unless such an apportionment would on some basis be unreasonable or inequitable.⁶ The memorandum opinion is silent on personal (non-official) travel.

- 1990 Memorandum Opinion – This memorandum opinion discusses similar principles in the context of official, political, or personal travel.⁷ The memorandum notes that certain individuals are required in the performance of their official duties to accompany the President whenever he travels. The official nature of the responsibilities performed by these persons does not change depending upon whether the trip is official, political, or personal. For these personnel—such as Secret Service, military aides and support personnel, communications personnel, and additional staff the President requires for advice and assistance in transacting public business—the memorandum indicates that expenses should generally be paid from public funds.

According to an official in the Executive Office of the President, the 1982 memorandum was not applicable to the President's February 2013 trip because the travel did not involve political events.

⁶The memorandum clarifies that no specific formula for apportionment is suggested (such as hours, number of events, or distances), and states that the overriding factor is the reasonableness of the apportionment in a specific situation. See *id.* at 220 n.6.

⁷See White House Communications Agency Expenses Incurred on Political or Personal Travel by the President, 14 Op. Off. Legal Counsel 144 (1990). The memorandum opinion responds to a request from the White House related to expenses of the White House Communication Agency in furtherance of its official mission.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO Contact

Brian Lepore, (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

Staff Acknowledgements

In addition to the contact named above, Gina Hoffman (Assistant Director), Amy Bush, James Krustapentus, Michael Shaughnessy, Michael Silver, Carol Petersen and Sarah Wilson made key contributions to this report.

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