



June 2021

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

Estimated Costs and COVID-19 Protective Measures for 2020 Fourth of July Events



A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-458](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since July 4, 1776, Americans have celebrated Independence Day through events held in towns and cities across the nation. In the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., visitors have celebrated on the National Mall with federally sponsored parades, concerts, fireworks, and in 2019 the Salute to America. In 2020, additional federally sponsored activities were held at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, federal Fourth of July celebrations in 2020 required adjustments and precautions in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

GAO was asked to review the estimated costs associated with the 2020 Fourth of July events and describe protective measures taken because of COVID-19. This report describes (1) the total estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for federal 2020 Fourth of July events, the appropriations used to pay the federal costs, and the extent to which the federal government reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions and (2) the protective measures that federal agencies and state jurisdictions took to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the events.

To perform this work, GAO reviewed documentation and interviewed personnel from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions about their estimated costs and actions at the events in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

View [GAO-21-458](#). For more information, contact Kristen Kocielek at (202) 512-2989 or kocielekk@gao.gov.

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What GAO Found

Federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions combined spent millions of dollars for the estimated costs of 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore. The various federal agencies involved in the events included the United States Capitol Police; the Executive Office of the President; and the Departments of the Interior, Defense, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services. Beyond the federal effort, the District of Columbia Government (DC Government), the state of South Dakota, and local law enforcement played a role in the events.

Fourth of July Estimated Costs for Events in 2020

| Event | Estimated costs (dollars) |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| General event costs ^a | 2,610,164 |
| A Capitol Fourth Concert | 3,888,607 |
| Independence Day fireworks | 2,546,737 |
| Salute to America | 1,610,811 |
| Mount Rushmore National Memorial Events | 3,917,289 |
| Total | 14,573,608 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-21-458

^aGeneral event costs are those that cannot be attributed to a specific event.

Costs incurred were associated with contracts, equipment, and federal personnel, such as costs for overtime pay. Officials GAO interviewed from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions said they did not incur COVID-19 mitigation costs for the events because personal protective equipment (PPE) and other related supplies used were from existing stockpiles. Federal agencies and the DC Government primarily used annual appropriations to fund the events. The National Park Service also used the Centennial Challenge and Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act appropriation accounts to fund portions of the Salute to America and Mount Rushmore events and to cover costs incurred as part of the fireworks display. The DC Government used funds from other available appropriations to cover the cost of events occurring after the obligation of its \$18 million appropriation for fiscal year 2020 security costs, including the \$1.4 million estimated cost of the 2020 Fourth of July events. The United States Park Police reimbursed state and local jurisdictions outside of Washington, D.C., \$35,057 for their costs associated with the events in the District.

During the 2020 Fourth of July events, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—issued federal guidelines as well as state and local guidelines that South Dakota and Washington, D.C., issued were in effect. These guidelines encouraged event organizers and the public to take a variety of steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Events held on federal property in Washington, D.C., were to follow federal guidelines that included recommendations for social distancing of 6 feet, use of cloth face coverings, and frequent handwashing. South Dakota state guidance was in effect for the events at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions instructed their employees to follow relevant COVID-19 guidance and provided employees with PPE. In addition, federal and state agencies made PPE, such as masks, available to the public.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------|
| CDC | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| DC Government | District of Columbia Government |
| DOD | Department of Defense |
| HHS | Department of Health and Human Services |
| NPS | National Park Service |
| PPE | personal protective equipment |
| WMATA | Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority |

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June 21, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Second Continental Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Since that day, Americans have celebrated their country's birth through various events held in towns and cities across the country. In the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., visitors have celebrated on the National Mall by attending federally sponsored events, such as the National Independence Day Parade, A Capitol Fourth Concert, Independence Day Fireworks Display, and in 2019 the Salute to America.

The 2020 Fourth of July events, however, were modified, in part because of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In 2020, while the Independence Day Fireworks Display and the Salute to America were held, the National Independence Day Parade was canceled and the Capitol Fourth Concert was prerecorded, without a live audience, from various locations across the country. Another change during 2020 was a celebration and fireworks display in South Dakota. Specifically, on July 3, 2020, the state of South Dakota, in coordination with the National Park Service (NPS), hosted an Independence Day celebration and fireworks display at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. These celebrations drew visitors to the National Mall and Mount Rushmore to watch events that the federal government, the state of South Dakota, and private entities sponsored and produced. The planning, production, and

execution of these events were extensive and involved the expenditure of federal dollars and use of resources from various federal agencies.

In an effort to better understand the cost of the events, including any COVID-19 mitigation costs, you asked us to review the impacts and estimated costs associated with the 2020 Fourth of July events. In addition, you asked us to describe the protective measures that federal agencies took to ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at federal Fourth of July events. This report describes, for the federal 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore, (1) the total estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for planning, producing, and executing the events, including COVID-19 mitigation costs; the appropriations that were used to pay the federal costs; and the extent to which the federal government reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions and (2) the protective measures that federal agencies and state jurisdictions took to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the events because of COVID-19.

To determine the estimated costs and understand the financial, physical, and human capital assets that agencies devoted to the events, we obtained and reviewed documentation, such as financial data, contracts, and relevant agreements, from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. We also interviewed officials from agencies and jurisdictions that contributed resources to the events. We also interviewed officials to determine the extent to which the federal government reimbursed costs that state and local jurisdictions incurred. In addition, to determine the protective measures that were taken, we interviewed officials from agencies and jurisdictions that contributed resources to the events and reviewed relevant guidance and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other federal, state, and local public health authorities related to COVID-19.

The scope of our review of the total costs consisted of estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for the 2020 Fourth of July events and the associated appropriation accounts. Federal agencies included the Departments of Defense, the Interior, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Energy, Transportation, and Justice; the Executive Office of the President; and the United States Capitol Police. For the purpose of this audit, we define “estimated costs” as the costs that agencies estimated to have been directly traceable to

the planning, production, and execution of the Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore for 2020.

We excluded costs that were not directly traceable to the planning, production, and execution of the specific Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore. We also excluded costs that would have been incurred regardless of whether the events took place. For example, salary costs for civilian federal employees and military personnel who performed duties during the events were not included because those costs would have been incurred regardless of the events on the Fourth of July. Also, because aircraft used for the events were existing Department of Defense (DOD) assets, we excluded the costs to operate and maintain the aircraft. In addition, according to DOD, the flying hours associated with the event were used to meet annual pilot training requirements. The value of donations from private entities is not included in our cost estimates. Cost estimates are attributable to each agency that provided them. We did not independently verify the data during this audit, and all costs included in this report are estimates. For the purpose of this audit, the COVID-19 mitigation costs and protective measures that federal agencies took are attributable to each agency; we did not assess the implementation of these measures. Appendix I describes our scope and methodology in more detail.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2020 to June 2021 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.

2020 Fourth of July Estimated Costs, Funding Sources, and State and Local Jurisdiction Reimbursements

2020 Fourth of July Events in Washington, D.C., and the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Costs Estimated at Millions of Dollars

According to the estimates we obtained, federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions combined spent millions of dollars for the 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore. Agencies and jurisdictions did not track all costs separately for each of the Fourth of July events. Therefore, we grouped estimated costs into six categories, which include general event costs, as well as costs for each of the specific events held in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore. Officials we interviewed from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions said they did not incur COVID-19 mitigation costs for the events because personal protective equipment (PPE) and other related supplies used were from existing stockpiles. Table 1 summarizes the 2020 event costs, and includes 2016 through 2019 event costs for comparison.¹

Table 1: Fourth of July Estimated Costs for Events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore, 2016–2020

In dollars

| Year | General event costs ^a | Parade ^b | Capitol Concert | Fireworks | Salute to America | Mount Rushmore | Total |
|------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 2020 | 2,610,164 | 0 | 3,888,607 | 2,546,737 ^c | 1,610,811 ^d | 3,917,289 ^e | 14,573,608 |
| 2019 | 3,995,492 | 0 | 4,612,249 | 408,599 | 4,265,869 ^d | n/a | 13,282,209 |
| 2018 | 2,335,254 | 0 | 3,968,350 | 294,604 | n/a | n/a | 6,598,208 |
| 2017 | 2,253,306 | 0 | 3,941,304 | 278,718 | n/a | n/a | 6,473,328 |
| 2016 | 2,378,983 | 0 | 4,079,088 | 252,896 | n/a | n/a | 6,710,967 |

Legend: n/a = not applicable.

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-21-458.

^aGeneral event costs are attributable to more than one specific event or costs from agencies that did not track costs by event.

¹GAO, *Independence Day Celebrations: Estimated Costs for Fourth of July Events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019*, [GAO-20-470](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 17, 2020).

^bThere are typically no costs to the government because a private entity produced the parade and managed its participants and associated costs during 2016 through 2019, which was funded through nonfederal sponsors and the event was canceled in 2020.

^cThe 2020 increase in the cost of fireworks displays in Washington, D.C., was due in part to the National Park Service costs for event security, screening, and other logistical costs. In prior years, those costs were categorized in the general event cost section, but because the parade was canceled and the concert was virtual, those costs were only related to the fireworks in 2020.

^dThe Salute to America event only occurred in 2019 and 2020. It did not take place in years 2016 through 2018.

^eThe Mount Rushmore National Memorial event on July 3, 2020, did not occur in years 2016 through 2019.

In addition to costs that could be directly attributed to Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore, there were costs associated with federal personnel and assets that we did not capture as event costs because they would have been incurred regardless of whether the Fourth of July events had occurred. For example, regular salaries of federal civilian, military, and law enforcement personnel who worked during the events were not included in cost estimates because those salaried personnel would have been paid even if the Fourth of July events did not occur.

General Event Costs

We categorized costs that could not be attributed to a specific event, and costs incurred by agencies that did not track costs by event, as general event costs. According to documents we reviewed and interviews with officials, more than \$2.6 million was spent on general event costs in 2020. Table 2 contains general event estimated costs by federal agency and local jurisdiction.

Table 2: Fourth of July General Event Estimated Costs in Washington, D.C., 2020

In dollars

| Entity | Amount |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| District of Columbia Government | 1,376,320 |
| Department of Health and Human Services | 1,214,011 |
| Department of Justice – Federal Bureau of Investigation | 18,789 |
| Department of Homeland Security – Federal Emergency Management Agency | 1,044 |
| Total | 2,610,164 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-21-458.

General event costs consisted of costs related to the events in Washington, D.C. The District of Columbia Government (DC Government) costs supported security and traffic control, fire and emergency support services, trash collection and city sanitization, vendor

licensing, and a command-and-control center in collaboration with the United States Park Police. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) incurred personnel and supply costs for medical aid stations for participants and attendees and veterinarian medical care for service animals working that day. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Federal Emergency Management Agency incurred costs for holiday pay and compensatory time.

National Independence Day Parade

Because of COVID-19, the National Independence Day Parade was canceled in 2020. As a result, no federal agency, state, or local jurisdiction incurred costs for the parade.

A Capitol Fourth Concert

According to documents we reviewed and agency officials we interviewed, the 2020 Capitol Fourth Concert cost the federal government an estimated \$3.9 million (see table 3). The costs are primarily for the contractor that planned and executed the concert. Normally the concert takes place on the grounds of the Capitol. However, because of COVID-19, in 2020 the concert was prerecorded in June on the west front area of the Capitol and involved lighting and camera vehicles. The public was not allowed to attend the prerecording. On the night of July 4, the event was broadcast along with historical footage, and there were no performers present. NPS provided funding to a private contractor that produced the virtual concert through a cooperative agreement. NPS provided minimal operational support to the private contractor but was responsible for funding the concert from its annual appropriations. The Army transferred \$3.2 million from its annual appropriations for fiscal year 2020 to NPS to support the Capitol Fourth Concert.

Table 3: Fourth of July A Capitol Fourth Concert Event Estimated Costs in Washington, D.C., 2020

In dollars

| Entity | Amount |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Department of the Interior – National Park Service ^a | 3,888,256 |
| United States Capitol Police | 351 |
| Total | 3,888,607 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies. | GAO-21-458.

^aThe Army transferred \$3.2 million from its annual appropriations for fiscal year 2020 to the National Park Service to support the Capitol Fourth Concert.

The United States Capitol Police is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for security on the Capitol grounds. According to agency

officials, the Capitol Police estimated that it incurred a small amount of overtime costs while filming the concert in June 2020 and for securing a lighting truck on the night of July 4 that would not have been incurred had the concert filming not taken place.

Independence Day Fireworks Display

The Independence Day Fireworks Display event estimated costs totaled about \$2.6 million (see table 4). NPS contracted with an entity that produced and executed the fireworks event. Another private entity donated additional fireworks, including associated logistical and personnel support. In addition to the contract costs, NPS provided safety officers who were on-site throughout the event and coordinated with both private entities. The Park Police, in conjunction with NPS and other state and local law enforcement, provided access control, emergency response, and general law enforcement support services. Further, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) incurred costs for extended service levels on July 4, 2020, primarily to accommodate the fireworks display on the National Mall. WMATA service was generally adjusted and reduced during July 2020, ending at 9:00 p.m. EST daily, because of COVID-19. However, on July 4, 2020, WMATA extended service to end at approximately 11:45 p.m. EST at designated stations near the National Mall. Finally, the United States Coast Guard incurred personnel travel costs in support of the event.

Table 4: Fourth of July Fireworks Display Event Estimated Costs in Washington, D.C., 2020

In dollars

| Entity | Amount |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Department of the Interior – National Park Service | 2,310,889 |
| Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority | 220,000 |
| Department of Homeland Security – United States Coast Guard | 15,848 |
| Total | 2,546,737 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-21-458.

We did not include costs associated with Coast Guard personnel and boats that patrolled a security perimeter around the fireworks event area. The Coast Guard stated that these boats and personnel would have been operating on July 4 regardless of whether the fireworks event occurred.

Salute to America

The Salute to America Event estimated costs totaled about \$1.6 million and primarily related to the Executive Office of the President’s production of the event (see table 5). The United States Secret Service also was

involved with the Salute to America event on the south grounds of the White House because the President, First Lady, Vice President, and other government officials attended. In order to prepare for and execute security for the event, the Secret Service used numerous special agents and incurred overtime and holiday pay. The Secret Service also incurred costs for items including antiscale fencing; concrete barriers; project management (including travel); and support items, such as trucks and forklifts. In addition, the DOD cost estimates include procurement of equipment and supplies and overtime and holiday pay for a number of DOD civilian and military personnel. Finally, the Federal Aviation Administration incurred costs for overtime pay for air traffic controllers routing aircraft during the flyovers.

Table 5: Fourth of July Salute to America Event Estimated Costs in Washington, D.C., 2020

In dollars

| Entity | Amount |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Executive Office of the President | 1,022,337 ^a |
| Department of Homeland Security | 478,645 |
| United States Coast Guard | 9,863 |
| United States Secret Service | 468,782 |
| Department of Defense | 104,716 |
| Department of the Air Force | 3,925 |
| Department of the Army | 62,595 |
| Department of the Navy and United States Marine Corps | 38,196 |
| Department of Transportation – Federal Aviation Administration | 5,113 |
| Total | 1,610,811 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies. | GAO-21-458.

^aThe Executive Office of the President was reimbursed \$763,477 of its \$1,022,337 estimated cost.

A private foundation provided the flyovers of vintage military aircraft during the Salute to America event, so there were no costs to the government. In addition, DOD and the Coast Guard provided military flyovers at the event, the costs of which—such as crew salaries, fuel, and asset depreciation—they did not consider attributable to the event. DOD and the Coast Guard stated that flying hours associated with the event were used to satisfy annual training requirements for their pilots and crew. However, some travel costs, such as lodging and food, were incurred for pilots and crew, which we included in the estimated costs above.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial

The Mount Rushmore event estimated costs totaled about \$3.9 million (see table 6). The costs incurred by the Executive Office of the President, the majority of which were reimbursed with NPS funds, were associated with logistics, planning, travel, temporary facility enhancement, food services, and visitor services related to the presidential visit. The state of South Dakota obtained special use permits from NPS to host the event and incurred personnel costs for traffic control, event planning, highway patrol, and travel. It also entered into several contracts for the fireworks, audio visual services, local fire and emergency medical services, and bus and shuttle services to transport attendees to and from designated parking areas. Included in the state of South Dakota’s estimated costs is a reimbursement to NPS for \$470,000 of its costs. NPS incurred costs for assisting the state of South Dakota, the White House Advance team, and a private contractor in the logistics, planning, and execution of this event.

Table 6: Fourth of July Mount Rushmore National Memorial Event Estimated Costs, 2020

In dollars

| Entity | Amount |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Executive Office of the President | 2,372,443 ^a |
| State of South Dakota | 1,120,315 |
| Department of the Interior – National Park Service | 321,293 |
| Department of Defense | 93,269 |
| Department of the Navy and United States Marine Corps | 55,000 |
| United States National Guard | 38,269 |
| Department of Homeland Security – United States Secret Service | 5,980 |
| Department of Transportation – Federal Aviation Administration | 3,989 |
| Total | 3,917,289 |

Source: GAO analysis of estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-21-458.

^aThe Executive Office of the President was reimbursed \$2,200,000 of its \$2,372,443 estimated cost.

While DOD provided military flyovers during the Mount Rushmore event, most of the costs associated with the flyovers, such as crew salaries, fuel, and asset depreciation, according to DOD, were not attributable to the event. DOD stated flying hours associated with the event were used to satisfy annual training requirements for their pilots and crew. However, some travel costs were incurred for pilots and an operation and maintenance team, which we included in the cost estimates above. The Secret Service incurred estimated costs for reimbursing DOD travel costs and providing fencing at the event to protect the President. The Federal

Aviation Administration incurred costs for overtime pay for air traffic controllers routing aircraft during the flyovers. Finally, NPS received a donation from a private entity for performers at the event.

Funding Sources and Reimbursements to State and Local Jurisdictions

We found that the majority of the federal agencies, including the Capitol Police, Department of Homeland Security, DOD, NPS, Department of Justice, Department of Transportation, and Executive Office of the President funded costs for the 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore with annual appropriations. However, NPS used other funding sources, which are detailed below.

In addition to annual appropriation funds from the Operation of the National Park System account, NPS used the Centennial Challenge² and Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act³ appropriation accounts to cover costs.⁴ For the Salute to America event, the Capitol Fourth Concert, and the Mount Rushmore events, NPS used annual appropriation funds from the Operation of the National Park System account. For the Salute to America and the Mount Rushmore events, NPS also used Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act funds for Reimbursable Agreements with the Executive Office of the President to provide financial support for official costs associated with the temporary facility enhancement and visitor services on the south lawn of the White House. The funds were also used to provide financial support for costs associated with travel, temporary facility enhancement, and visitor services related to the presidential visit to Mount Rushmore. NPS also used the Centennial Challenge appropriation account to pay for certain costs incurred for the fireworks display. The Department of the Army entered into an agreement with NPS and transferred funds from its annual appropriations for fiscal year 2020 to NPS to support the Capitol Fourth and Memorial Day concerts, of which \$3.2 million was used for the Capitol Fourth Concert.

The DC Government received an appropriation of \$18 million for fiscal year 2020 from the federal government for emergency planning and security costs in the District of Columbia, which remains available until

²Pub. L. No. 116-94, div. D, 133 Stat. 2534, 2694 (Dec. 20, 2019); 54 U.S.C. § 101701.

³16 U.S.C. § 6806.

⁴We reported on a similar use of Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act fees in *Independence Day Celebrations: Estimated Costs for Fourth of July Events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019*, [GAO-20-470](#) (Washington, D.C.; June 17, 2020), and are currently considering whether the use of the funds was proper as a matter of appropriations law.

expended. The appropriation is for the costs of providing public safety at events related to the presence of the national capital in the District. According to DC Government officials, they obligated the entire amount appropriated in fiscal year 2020 for various events. The DC Government used funds from other available appropriations to cover the cost of events occurring after the obligation of all of the funds for emergency planning and security costs, including the \$1.4 million estimated cost of the 2020 Fourth of July events. Finally, the Park Police reimbursed state and local jurisdictions outside the District estimated costs of \$35,057 for assistance with the Washington, D.C., events for 2020.

COVID-19 Guidelines and Protective Measures Taken at the Fourth of July Events

On January 31, 2020, the Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a state of public health emergency in response to COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and on March 13, 2020, the President proclaimed that COVID-19 constituted a national emergency. As a result, various federal, state, and local entities issued COVID-19 guidelines to help prevent the spread of the virus, including at events and gatherings. Officials we interviewed said they implemented various protective measures—such as providing masks and other PPE—to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the federally sponsored Fourth of July events.

Federal Guidelines

The CDC issued guidance for events and gatherings that was in effect during the Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at Mount Rushmore. The guidance was designed to enhance the protection of individuals and communities and aid in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The CDC provided the guidance as supplementary guidelines meant to enhance, and not replace, any state or local health and safety laws, regulations, and rules.

The CDC defined gatherings as planned or spontaneous events, indoors or outdoors, with a small or large number of people in attendance, such as a community event or gathering, concert, festival, conference, parade, wedding, or sporting event. In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 for highest-risk events, the CDC advised event planners to (1) advise those who have COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 to stay home; (2) ensure that there are accessible sinks and enough supplies for people to clean their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes; (3) require employees and encourage attendees to use cloth face coverings; (4) modify layouts and provide guides, such as tape or signs, to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart; (5) broadcast regular announcements on preventing the spread of COVID-19; and (6)

post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances and in restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures, such as handwashing and using proper cloth face coverings.⁵

State and Local Guidelines

In response to COVID-19, the Governor of South Dakota issued a series of executive orders, beginning March 13, 2020, declaring a state of emergency in the state. Executive Order 2020-20, issued on April 28, 2020, initiated South Dakota's "Back to Normal Plan," rescinding previous orders and detailing the expectations for individuals, businesses, schools, health care providers, and local governments to return to normal business and social interactions, including practicing good hygiene, staying home when sick, practicing physical distancing, and taking extra care if a vulnerable individual.

The Mayor of Washington, D.C., issued Mayor's Order 2020-045 on March 11, 2020, declaring a public health emergency because of COVID-19 in Washington, D.C. Effective May 29, 2020, Mayor's Order 2020-067 provided a four-phase approach to reopening businesses, government activities, and other operations. Effective June 22, 2020, Mayor's Order 2020-075 implemented phase two of the Mayor's reopening approach and continued during the Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C. However, the Mayor's orders are not applicable to gatherings on property within the District of Columbia owned by the federal government. Therefore, all federal events held on federal property in the District of Columbia, including the Independence Day Fireworks Display, Capitol Fourth Concert, and Salute to America, were not governed by restrictions put in place by the Mayor.

Protective Measures Taken in Washington, D.C.

According to documentation we reviewed and officials we interviewed, Capitol Police personnel took several protective measures during the production of the Capitol Fourth Concert to mitigate COVID-19 risks. The Capitol Police business board issued the permit for the prerecorded Capitol Fourth Concert event on the Capitol grounds in June. This permit included COVID-19 restrictions, taking into consideration the local and federal guidelines in place at the time. Specifically, the permit limited the event to no more than nine participants, required adherence to CDC guidelines, and required sanitization of all equipment. Capitol Police personnel involved in the prerecording event and security on the Fourth of

⁵The CDC defined highest risk events as large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.

July were provided with and required to use PPE and encouraged to remain socially distanced.

Numerous protective measures were taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 at the Independence Day Fireworks Display on the National Mall. Specifically, NPS devised and implemented mitigation strategies to help ensure the safety and health of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the event. These included (1) encouraging visitors to wear masks and follow CDC COVID-19 guidelines, placing signs at all entry points, medical aid stations, and portable toilet banks 20 feet apart from each other; (2) making masks available to the public, law enforcement, and medical staff; (3) providing 114 handwashing stations; and (4) disseminating pre-event communications that discouraged those who were sick from attending.

Multiple other protective measures were taken. For example, restrooms were stocked with hand sanitizer and were sanitized throughout the day. Concessionaries were directed to follow the CDC guidelines. A separate screening area was established outside each medical aid station and fenced with 6 feet between the fence and the tent to encourage social distancing. A portion of each station was screened off and designated as a treatment area for any patient who screened positive for COVID-19 symptoms and was disinfected after each patient discharge. Each station was supported with a team leader from HHS to maintain adherence to COVID-19 precautions. HHS also deployed multiple safety officers at the event to address any concerns and encourage adherence to strict COVID-19 precautions by medical responders. All HHS personnel were screened for COVID-19 symptoms, provided with and required to use PPE, and instructed to take necessary precautions. According to officials we interviewed, personnel were provided with PPE and recommended to socially distance and received screening for COVID-19 symptoms before entering on duty.

The Salute to America event included several COVID-19 precautions. Specifically, attendee arrival times at the Salute to America event on the south lawn of the White House were staggered in order to facilitate social distancing. In addition, markings delineating distancing were placed in all areas where guests queued, including entrances, beverage stations, and restrooms. Signs were placed throughout the event encouraging social distancing, handwashing, and the wearing of face coverings. Attendees were seated at tables with 50 percent capacity and spaced apart. According to officials we interviewed, personnel were required to wear

face coverings and maintain social distance where appropriate and were screened for COVID-19 symptoms.

Protective Measures Taken at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial

As outlined in the project agreement, the state of South Dakota, Department of the Interior, and NPS were responsible for the protective measures taken to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at Mount Rushmore on July 3, 2020. According to the agreement, all parties were responsible for directing COVID-19 protective measures for the event to ensure adherence to all CDC guidelines.

Prior to the event, the state of South Dakota included information on the event's Frequently Asked Questions page of its website asking participants to follow CDC guidelines. During the event, NPS provided PPE to event staff, developed signage that was distributed throughout the event, and encouraged attendees to remain socially distanced and wear masks. However, social distancing and mask wearing were not requirements. The National Guard participants were required to wear masks and gloves, and the President's security and those who would meet or be in proximity to the President were screened for COVID-19 symptoms by state of South Dakota officials at the event.

Agency and Third-Party Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Executive Office of the President, DOD, Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Energy, Capitol Police, DC Government, HHS, WMATA, DOT, state of South Dakota, and Department of Justice for review and comment. The Executive Office of the President, Department of the Interior, DC Government, and Department of Justice provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. DOD, Department of Homeland Security, Capitol Police, Department of Energy, HHS, DOT, WMATA, and state of South Dakota told us that they had no comments on the draft report.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Executive Office of the President, the Secretary of the Interior, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2989 or kociolekk@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on

the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristen A. Kociolek". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristen Kociolek
Director
Financial Management and Assurance

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to describe for the federal 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial (1) the total estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for planning, producing, and executing the events, including Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) mitigation costs; the appropriations that were used to pay the federal costs; and the extent to which the federal government reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions and (2) the protective measures that federal agencies and state jurisdictions took to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the events.

To accomplish these objectives, we obtained and reviewed documentation, such as financial data, contracts, and relevant agreements, from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. We also interviewed officials from agencies and jurisdictions that contributed resources to the events. Federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions we contacted were the Executive Office of the President, Department of Defense (DOD), Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, United States Capitol Police, Department of Energy,¹ Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation, Department of Justice, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, District of Columbia Government, and the state of South Dakota. We also interviewed officials to determine the extent to which the federal government reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions. In addition, we reviewed cost documents and other agency records to understand the assets, including financial, physical, and human capital that each agency devoted to the events. We interviewed officials about estimated costs, any reimbursed costs, and any COVID-19 mitigation costs.

In addition, we reviewed relevant COVID-19 guidance and recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal, state, and local public health authorities that were in place during the 2020 events. We also interviewed officials and documented the protective measures that, according to officials, federal agencies took because of COVID-19 to help ensure the health and safety of the public, federal employees, and other essential workers at the Fourth of July events. The COVID-19 prevention measures taken for the

¹Department of Energy officials stated that the agency did not incur costs directly related to their involvement with the 2020 Fourth of July events.

events are based on discussions with federal and state and local officials. We did not assess the implementation of these measures.

The scope of our review of the total costs consisted of estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for the events and the associated appropriation accounts. For the purpose of this audit, we define “estimated costs” as the costs that agencies estimated to have been directly traceable to planning, producing, and executing the 2020 Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. For example, we included personnel overtime and holiday pay expenses for federal employees associated with the events in the estimated costs. The costs also included contracts that various federal agencies awarded to private entities that were specifically attributable to the events.

We excluded costs that were not directly traceable to planning, producing, and executing the specific Fourth of July events in Washington, D.C., and at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial and that would have been incurred regardless of whether the events took place. For example, salary costs for civilian federal employees and military personnel who performed duties during the events were not included. Also, we excluded the costs to operate and maintain DOD aircraft that were used in the events because the aircraft were existing DOD assets. In addition, according to DOD, the flying hours associated with the event were used to meet annual pilot training requirements. Further, we excluded the cost associated with private entity donations. Cost estimates are attributable to each agency that provided them. We did not independently verify the estimated cost data provided during this audit.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2020 to June 2021 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.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Kristen Kociolek, (202) 512-2989 or kociolek@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Jonathan Meyer (Assistant Director), Kevin Scott (Auditor in Charge), and John Ledford made major contributions to this report. Other key contributors include Carl Barden, Marcia Carlsen, Angela Clowers, Elizabeth Erdmann, Pat Frey, Richard Geiger, Gretta Goodwin, Maxine Hattery, William Hong, Jason Kirwan, and Lisa Motley.

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