



June 2020

# INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

## Estimated Costs for Fourth of July Events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-470](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Second Continental Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Since that day, Americans have celebrated this holiday through 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, A Salute to America.

GAO was asked to review the impacts and estimated costs associated with the Fourth of July events on the National Mall. Specifically, this report describes the following for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019: (1) the total costs federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions are estimated to have incurred and (2) the appropriations that were used to pay for the estimated federal costs; the extent, if any, to which the federal government reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions; and the extent, if any, to which federal agencies delayed, deferred, or canceled other programs or activities as a result of resources being used for Fourth of July events.

To perform this work, GAO reviewed documentation and interviewed personnel from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions about their estimated costs and resources used for the events.

View [GAO-20-470](#). For more information, contact Kristen Kocielek at (202) 512-2989 or [kocielekk@gao.gov](mailto:kocielekk@gao.gov).

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## INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

### Estimated Costs for Fourth of July Events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019

## What GAO Found

From 2016 through 2019, hundreds of personnel from numerous federal agencies, state and local jurisdictions, and private entities planned, produced, and executed events on the National Mall that celebrated Independence Day of the United States. The National Park Service (NPS) was responsible for the overall execution of Fourth of July events on the National Mall. In addition, various federal agencies—including the Department of Homeland Security, United States Capitol Police, United States Coast Guard, and Department of Justice—helped to ensure safety. Beyond the federal effort, the District of Columbia Government (DC Government) and local law enforcement played a role in the overall events. Further, given the crowds and potential for high temperatures in July in Washington, D.C., it was important that organizers—including the Department of Health and Human Services—ensured adequate medical resources were available to attendees and participants.

The estimated costs for the events held in 2016, 2017, and 2018 ranged from \$6 million to \$7 million annually, and included contract costs with private entities tasked with producing and executing the concert and fireworks. They also included the costs for overtime and holiday pay for federal employees working at the events. In 2019, with the addition of the Salute to America event, the Department of Defense (DOD) and Executive Office of the President undertook additional efforts. Estimated costs for the 2019 events on the National Mall increased to more than \$13 million. This increase was attributable to the cost for DOD to transport several vehicles to the National Mall, the production and execution of the Salute to America event, and the additional security involved because the President attended the event.

In addition, there were costs not directly attributable to the events, including salaries of some federal employees who performed duties during the events, as well as costs for fuel and depreciation on DOD assets. These costs were classified as not directly attributable to the Fourth of July events because they would have been incurred regardless of whether the events occurred. For example, according to DOD, the flight time related to the military flyovers for the Salute to America event were required training hours that pilots must complete annually, and therefore the related expenses, such as pilot salaries and fuel costs, were not included in event cost estimates.

Finally, federal agencies and the DC Government primarily used annual federal appropriations to pay for the event costs. The DC Government received an appropriation each year to provide for public safety at certain events within the District of Columbia. According to DC Government officials, DC Government obligated the entire amount appropriated in fiscal year 2019 for the various events in the District of Columbia, including the Fourth of July events on the National Mall. DC Government officials stated that they did not request additional appropriations from Congress because they used funds from other appropriations to cover the cost of events exceeding the fiscal year 2019 appropriation. Agency officials did not identify any federal activities that were delayed, deferred, or canceled because of the resources used for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

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### Abbreviations

Capitol Police	United States Capitol Police
Coast Guard	United States Coast Guard
DC Government	District of Columbia Government
DOD	Department of Defense
EOP	Executive Office of the President
FLREA	Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act
FPS	Federal Protective Service
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
NORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
NPS	National Park Service
Park Police	United States Park Police
Secret Service	United States Secret Service
SI	Smithsonian Institution

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June 17, 2020

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Udall  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
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. Each year, these events bring thousands of Americans to the National Mall to watch events sponsored and produced by the federal government and private entity donations. The planning, production, and execution of these events are extensive and involve the expenditure of federal dollars and use of resources from various federal agencies. As with any large federal event, it is important to have an understanding of the costs and the events' effect on other federal government operations.

In an effort to better understand the events and their costs, you asked us to review the impacts and estimated costs associated with the Fourth of July events on the National Mall, including whether federal expenditures for the events complied with appropriations law. This report describes for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019 (1) the total costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions are estimated to have incurred and (2) the appropriations that were used to pay for the estimated federal costs; the extent, if any, to which the federal government has reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions; and the extent, if any, to which federal agencies delayed,

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deferred, or canceled other programs or activities as a result of resources being used for Fourth of July events. We are issuing a separate legal decision on agency communications to the public regarding the Fourth of July events.

To assess the impact and estimated costs associated with the Fourth of July events on the National Mall, we obtained and reviewed documentation, such as financial data, contracts, and relevant agreements, from federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions that contributed resources to the events. In addition, we reviewed cost documents and other agency records to gain an understanding of the assets, including financial, physical, and human capital that agencies devoted to the events. We also interviewed federal agency and state and local officials.

The scope of our review consisted of estimated costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions incurred for the events and associated appropriation accounts. For the purpose of this engagement, we defined estimated costs as the costs that agencies estimated to have been directly traceable to the planning, production, and execution of the specific Fourth of July events on the National Mall. For example, we included the transportation costs of moving material, equipment, and supplies to the National Mall for Fourth of July events, as well as overtime and holiday pay expenses for federal employees. The estimated costs also include the costs associated with contracts specifically related to the events that various federal agencies awarded to private entities.

We excluded costs that are not directly traceable to the planning, production, and execution of the specific Fourth of July events on the National Mall and that would have been incurred regardless of whether the events took place, such as salary costs for civilian federal employees and military personnel who performed duties during the events. Also, we excluded the costs to operate and maintain Department of Defense (DOD) aircraft that were used in the Salute to America event 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 that were required regardless of the events on the Fourth of July. Cost estimates were provided by and attributable to each agency, and we did not independently verify the data during this audit; all costs included in this report are estimates.

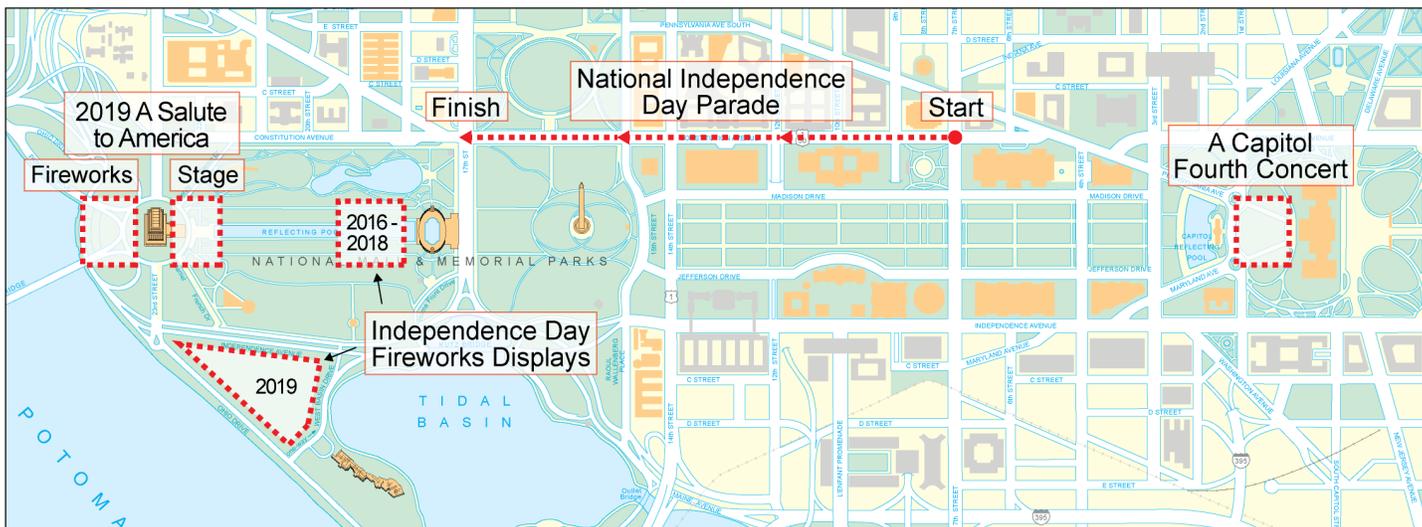
Appendix I describes our scope and methodology in more detail.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2019 through June 2020 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

Each year more than a dozen federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions were involved in the Fourth of July events on the National Mall. Some were involved in the overall planning, production, and execution of the events as a whole, while others played specific roles in only one event. Figure 1 shows the overall geographic layout of each event that occurred on the National Mall.

**Figure 1: Fourth of July National Mall Event Locations for 2016 through 2019**



Source: National Park Service, GAO. | GAO-20-470

## Overall Event Organization, Security, and Attendee and Participant Health

For 2016 through 2019, the National Park Service (NPS) was responsible for the overall organization and execution of Fourth of July events on the National Mall, including the National Independence Day Parade; A Capitol Fourth Concert; Independence Day Fireworks Display; and in 2019, A Salute to America. Successful completion of these events depended on NPS, including United States Park Police (Park Police), coordinating with federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions to ensure that attendees could safely and securely attend each event. In addition, during the 2019

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events, because of the addition of the Salute to America event and attendance by the President of the United States, additional federal agencies were involved with the planning, production, and execution of the events.

Overall event security for the 2016 through 2019 events on the National Mall was coordinated among several federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. Specifically, the following organizations provided security personnel and assets for the events overall:

- Park Police provided overall coordination with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and assisted with event security.
- State and local law enforcement agencies assisted with security, traffic, and crowd control.
- The District of Columbia Government (DC Government) provided a comprehensive command, control, and coordination system, in conjunction with federal partners, to ensure seamless event activities and the safety and security of all attendees. The DC Government tasked multiple offices in its organization to help with ensuring event security, including the Metropolitan Police Department, which deployed uniformed officers in areas surrounding the National Mall and provided traffic control and road closures.
- The National Guard deployed hundreds of personnel who provided security, movement of supplies, and crowd management at road intersections and metro stations.
- The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority provided buses to barricade road closures for 2016 through 2018.
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and Department of Energy deployed specialized law enforcement and security support units during all of the Fourth of July events on the National Mall.

Given the large crowds and potential for high temperatures in July in Washington, D.C., it was important that organizers ensured that adequate medical resources were available to attendees and participants for the 2016 through 2019 events. This was accomplished by coordination between the following federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions:

- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided medical aid stations for attendees and participants and veterinarian services for NPS working animals at various locations on the National Mall. In 2019, HHS provided additional efforts, including a larger

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medical aid station at the end of the parade route to assist with heat casualties and a command and control team to coordinate and support HHS personnel on the National Mall.

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency participated in the public safety planning for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall in 2016 through 2018. Because of increased security levels in 2019, the agency coordinated the support of federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions, and deployed an emergency response team.
- The DC Government deployed numerous personnel from its offices, including Fire and Emergency Medical Services and the Department of Health to respond to health emergencies at the events.
- The Smithsonian Institution (SI) and the Federal Protective Service (FPS) assisted by providing their facilities as safe havens for citizens to seek shelter in the event of severe weather or other emergency. Each year, SI staffed its facilities near the National Mall with security protection officers, grounds cleanup crews, and emergency medical technician support as part of its assistance. In addition, FPS personnel staffed federal buildings near the National Mall and operated safe haven locations.

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## National Independence Day Parade

For 2016 through 2019, the National Independence Day Parade ran along Constitution Avenue NW from 7th Street NW to 17th Street NW. A private entity produced the parade, and obtained a Public Gathering Permit from NPS. The entity managed the parade, its participants, and associated costs, with funding from nonfederal sponsors. NPS participated in the parade by coordinating with an additional private entity, which fully funded the creation and operation of a parade float for NPS. In addition, several military bands regularly participated in the parade.

To ensure security for the parade, the Park Police requested assistance annually from the DC Government, National Guard, and FPS. The DC Government assisted by ensuring roads were closed to vehicle traffic on the parade route, the National Guard assisted by providing personnel and assets for road closure, and FPS provided personnel to ensure parade-route safety.

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## A Capitol Fourth Concert

For 2016 through 2019, the Capitol Fourth Concert was broadcast live from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol by the Public Broadcasting Service. As we have previously reported, a private entity in the District of

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Columbia has produced the annual concert for many years.<sup>1</sup> The private entity received federal funding from NPS through a cooperative agreement that provided funding from NPS and the Department of the Army and sponsorships from other private entities. The private entity was responsible for producing the concert, including the selection of musical acts and coordination with DOD for military band attendees.

Because of its jurisdiction over the Capitol grounds, the United States Capitol Police (Capitol Police) provided perimeter security and security screening of concert attendees, in coordination with multiple federal agencies and local jurisdictions. In addition, the Architect of the Capitol provided security barriers, fencing, ground protection, turf restoration, trash removal, and setup and teardown of the security elements on the Capitol grounds.

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## Independence Day Fireworks Display

For 2016 through 2019, annually, NPS entered into a contract with a private entity that was responsible for producing and executing the fireworks display. For 2016 through 2018, the fireworks were launched from the Reflecting Pool between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, with that area being restricted to visitors for safety and security. However, in 2019, the launch site was relocated to the West Potomac Park.

The Park Police provided security over the fireworks and coordinated with federal law enforcement agencies, which provided security and conducted a sweep of the fireworks launch area. Many attendees of the fireworks display viewed the show from their personal watercraft on the Potomac River. The United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) provided security on Potomac River waterways to ensure attendee safety and to establish a secured perimeter for the launch site.

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## Salute to America

In 2019, the Salute to America event was held for the first time in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The event included military band performances, a military display, a speech by the President of the United States, military aircraft flyovers, and a fireworks display. The planning of the event began after a meeting at the White House where the Secretaries of the Interior and Defense were tasked with event planning, production, and execution. The Executive Office of the President (EOP) coordinated the content of the event and contracted with a private entity, which was responsible for

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *U.S. Capitol Grounds Concerts: Improvements Needed in Management Approval Controls over Certain Payments*, [GAO-17-44](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 25, 2016).

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general event production. NPS and EOP entered into a reimbursable agreement whereby EOP, and the private entity with which it contracted, coordinated and produced the event, paid for with NPS appropriations. The EOP determined the guest list and distributed tickets for the event. According to EOP, it distributed tickets in a manner similar to that for other White House events.

The Secretary of the Interior tasked NPS with permitting for the event, coordinating with the United States Secret Service (Secret Service) on security and with the DC Government on movement of DOD assets, relocating the existing contracted fireworks display from the Reflecting Pool to the West Potomac Park and coordinating the acceptance of an additional donated fireworks display. The DC Government had additional responsibilities in 2019 compared to prior years because of the vehicles that the Department of the Army provided for the Salute to America event. For example, DC Government personnel consulted with engineers to verify that affected roads, sewer pipes, and bridges could withstand the weight of bringing in the M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles and conducted damage assessments after the event, during which no damage was identified.

The DOD Joint Staff received orders from the Secretary of Defense directing United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to organize a flyover and provide support to the Salute to America event. NORTHCOM tasked the Coast Guard, Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, and United States Air Force to ensure that various DOD assets were in attendance. The Department of the Army stood up a Joint Operations Center within its Joint Force Headquarters Branch, National Capital Region, to coordinate the various DOD assets involved. Prior to the President's speech, several military bands performed for the audience in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Displayed on both sides of the performing bands were two M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles provided by the Department of the Army.

At designated times during the President's speech, DOD aircraft participated in flyovers, including

- Air Force B-2 Stealth Bombers, Air Force One, F-22 Raptors, and F-35 Lightning IIs;
- Navy F/A 18 Hornet Blue Angels and F-35 Lightning IIs;
- Marine Corps MV22 Osprey helicopters and Marine One;

- Army AH-64 Apache and CH-47 Chinook helicopters; and
- Coast Guard H-65 Dolphin and H-60 Jayhawk helicopters and HC-144 Medium Range Surveillance Aircraft.

Following the President’s speech and associated flyovers, a fireworks display, donated by two private entities through a donation agreement with NPS, was presented from the Lincoln Memorial.

Because the President, Vice President, and other government officials attended the event, the Secret Service had primary responsibility for security of the event and surrounding areas, in coordination with the Park Police. The Secret Service requested the assistance of the Transportation Security Administration, which provided security screening for the event. The Coast Guard provided additional support on the Potomac River during the event, because of the additional firework display, and requested the assistance of the United States Customs and Border Protection, which provided additional waterway security. The Federal Aviation Administration provided an air traffic controller that shut down the airspace around the National Mall and assisted with the Salute to America flyovers. Because of the additional fireworks, the Park Police provided additional security at the storage site of the fireworks and additional road closures. The Park Police coordinated with state and local law enforcement to provide escorts for the M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles.

## Fourth of July Events on the National Mall Costs Estimated at Millions of Dollars Annually

According to estimates we obtained, federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions combined spent millions of dollars annually for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall during 2016 through 2019. Not all costs were tracked separately by the organizations for each of the Fourth of July events. Therefore, in order to develop a comprehensive estimate of the costs, we grouped costs into five categories, which include general event costs as well as costs for each of the specific events held on the National Mall. Table 1 summarizes the event costs we obtained, by year and event.

**Table 1: Fourth of July Events Estimated Costs by Event, 2016 through 2019**

In dollars

Year	General Event Costs	Parade	Capitol Concert	Fireworks	Salute to America	Total
2019	3,995,492	0	4,612,249	408,599	4,265,869	<b>13,285,209</b>
2018	2,335,254	0	3,968,350	294,604	Not applicable	<b>6,601,208</b>
2017	2,253,306	0	3,941,304	278,718	Not applicable	<b>6,476,327</b>

Year	General Event Costs	Parade	Capitol Concert	Fireworks	Salute to America	Total
2016	2,378,983	0	4,079,088	252,896	Not applicable	6,713,967

Source: Estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-20-470

In addition to costs that could be directly attributed to Fourth of July events on the National Mall, there were other costs incurred 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, costs such as 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 attributable to more than one specific event, or to agencies that did not track costs by event, as general event costs. According to documents we reviewed and interviews with agency officials, more than \$2 million was spent annually on general event costs. Table 2 contains general event cost by federal agency and state or local jurisdiction, and by year.

**Table 2: Fourth of July Events Estimated General Event Costs, 2016 through 2019**

In dollars

Agency	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Department of Health and Human Services</b>	<b>1,283,729</b>	<b>1,007,103</b>	<b>1,114,936</b>	<b>1,214,011</b>
<b>Department of the Interior – National Park Service</b>	<b>768,607</b>	<b>924,513</b>	<b>770,946</b>	<b>1,014,647</b>
<b>District of Columbia Government</b>	<b>180,722</b>	<b>210,478</b>	<b>320,274</b>	<b>1,607,063</b>
<b>Department of Justice</b>	<b>106,354</b>	<b>77,438</b>	<b>88,887</b>	<b>96,812</b>
Federal Bureau of Investigation	105,544	76,415	87,981	96,162
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives	810	1,023	906	650
<b>Department of Homeland Security</b>	<b>5,207</b>	<b>2,875</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>20,701</b>
United States Customs and Border Protection	0	0	0	4,646
Federal Emergency Management Agency	5,207	2,875	219	16,054
<b>Department of Energy</b>	<b>26,734</b>	<b>23,986</b>	<b>34,554</b>	<b>35,942</b>
<b>Smithsonian Institution</b>	<b>7,630</b>	<b>6,913</b>	<b>5,438</b>	<b>4,741</b>
<b>Department of Defense – National Guard</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,575</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,378,983</b>	<b>2,253,306</b>	<b>2,335,254</b>	<b>3,995,492</b>

Source: Estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-20-470

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General event costs consisted primarily of the personnel and supplies costs for HHS medical aid stations, Department of the Interior overtime, holiday pay and supply costs, and costs for DC Government personnel payroll. Specifically, federal and local law enforcement agencies provided security, screening of attendees, traffic control, road blockades, and escorts for participants at all the events. These agencies incurred salaries, overtime, and overtime with differential pay for civilian and law enforcement personnel. Other costs included providing personnel and supplies for fire and emergency medical services, crowd control, information and directions for attendees, cleaning of the grounds, and safe haven areas in case of an emergency.

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### National Independence Day Parade Event Costs

According to documents we reviewed and agency officials we interviewed, no federal agency recorded costs specifically attributable to the National Independence Day Parade for 2016 through 2019. A private entity produced the parade and managed its participants and associated costs, which was funded through nonfederal sponsors. The security during the event, provided by the National Guard and FPS, was not included in cost estimates because those salaried personnel would have been paid regardless of the parade. The majority of federal participants in the parade were local ceremonial military personnel, including military bands, marching platoons, color guards, Army Old Guard fife and drum corps, an Army anthem vocalist, and other ceremonial military participants who would have received their salaries and benefits on the Fourth of July even if the parade did not occur.

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### A Capitol Fourth Concert Event Costs

According to documents we reviewed and agency officials we interviewed, the concert cost the federal government an estimated \$4 million annually from 2016 through 2019. The concert takes place on the grounds of the Capitol and the costs are primarily for the contractor that plans and executes the concert. NPS provided minimal operations support to the entity that produced the concert but was responsible for funding the concert from its annual appropriations and with additional funding that the Department of the Army provides each year. Table 3 contains the concert cost by agency for 2016 through 2019.

**Table 3: Fourth of July A Capitol Fourth Concert Event Estimated Costs, 2016 through 2019**

In dollars

<b>Agency</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Department of the Interior – National Park Service <sup>a</sup>	3,506,059	3,415,345	3,373,881	3,998,503
United States Capitol Police	411,861	356,834	351,928	360,684
Architect of the Capitol	161,169	168,141	242,541	253,062
Department of Defense – Department of the Navy and Marine Corps	0	984	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,079,088</b>	<b>3,941,304</b>	<b>3,968,350</b>	<b>4,612,249</b>

Source: Estimated cost data provided by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. | GAO-20-470

<sup>a</sup>Includes amounts transferred from Department of the Army accounts.

The Capitol Police is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for security and screening the attendees on the Capitol grounds. The Capitol Police estimated that it incurred several hundred thousand dollars annually in overtime and holiday pay costs that would not have been incurred had the concert not taken place. The Architect of the Capitol incurred other concert costs for its involvement. Additionally, DOD had bus rental costs for movement of ceremonial military personnel in 2017.

Other costs not considered directly attributable to the concert included salaries and benefits of federal military participants. The salary costs for these personnel would have been incurred regardless of their participation in the Fourth of July events.

### Independence Day Fireworks Display Event Costs

Independence Day Fireworks Display event costs were estimated from \$253,000 to \$409,000 annually from 2016 through 2019 (see table 4). Each year, NPS contracted with a private entity, which produced and executed the fireworks display. The cost associated with this contract was the majority of the cost of the event. In addition to the contract costs, other fireworks display event costs included paying overtime for security personnel during the event, conducting security sweeps prior to the event, securing areas for storage of fireworks, closing roads, and performing cleanup after the fireworks. In addition, the Coast Guard had personnel travel costs in 2019.

**Table 4: Fourth of July Fireworks Display Event Estimated Costs, 2016 through 2019**

In dollars

Agency	2016	2017	2018	2019
Department of the Interior – National Park Service	252,896	278,718	294,604	375,153
Department of Homeland Security – United States Coast Guard	0	0	0	33,446
<b>Total</b>	<b>252,896</b>	<b>278,718</b>	<b>294,604</b>	<b>408,599</b>

Source: Estimated cost data provided by federal agencies, state and local jurisdictions and private entities. | GAO-20-470

Other event costs not considered directly attributable to the fireworks display were for Coast Guard personnel and boats that patrolled a security perimeter around the event area. The Coast Guard stated that these boats and personnel would have been operating on the Fourth of July regardless of whether the fireworks display event occurred.

## Salute to America Event Costs

The 2019 Salute to America Event cost an estimated \$4.3 million, primarily related to the EOP contract with a private entity to plan and execute the event (see table 5). The cost of that contract was approximately \$2.45 million and was funded with NPS appropriations through a Memorandum of Agreement with EOP. The movement of DOD ground assets to the Washington, D.C., area was also a cost for the event. Specifically, DOD used a contractor to transport vehicles and other military equipment to the event area at a cost of more than \$1.12 million. The Secret Service had significant involvement with events on the National Mall, and specifically with the Salute to America event, because the President, Vice President, and other government officials attended. In order to prepare for and execute security, the Secret Service used numerous special agents from its Washington, D.C., Field Office, and incurred overtime pay and cost for materials. In addition, the airspace in the area was shut down for this event, which included a fireworks display. Various federal agencies incurred overtime costs for storing the donated fireworks and for keeping additional roads closed.

**Table 5: Fourth of July A Salute to America Event Estimated Costs, 2019**

In dollars

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Department of the Interior – National Park Service</b>	<b>2,877,330</b>
<b>Department of Defense</b>	<b>1,257,056</b>
United States Air Force	22,278
Department of the Army	1,201,768
Department of the Navy and Marine Corps	33,011
<b>Department of Homeland Security</b>	<b>96,690</b>
United States Coast Guard	15,150
United States Secret Service	75,674
Transportation Security Administration	5,866
<b>Executive Office of the President</b>	<b>33,885</b>
<b>Department of Transportation</b>	<b>909</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,265,869</b>

Source: Estimated cost data provided by federal agencies, state and local jurisdictions and private entities. | GAO-20-470

While DOD and the Coast Guard provided military flyovers during the Salute to America event, most of the costs associated with the flyovers, such as crew salaries, fuel, and asset depreciation, were not attributable to the event. According to DOD and the Coast Guard, flying hours associated with the event were used to satisfy annual training requirements for their pilots. However, some travel costs were incurred for pilots and crew, which we included in the cost estimates in table 5. Finally, the estimate includes salaries for a small number of DOD civilian personnel who were paid holiday or overtime pay.

## Fourth of July Events’ Funding Sources, Reimbursements to State and Local Jurisdictions, and Effects on Other Federal Activities

We found that the majority of the agencies funded costs of the Fourth of July events with annual appropriations and did not receive any other funding. NPS used amounts from multiple appropriation accounts to pay for costs of the Fourth of July events for 2016 through 2019. For the Salute to America event in 2019, NPS used the Operation of the National Park System, Centennial Challenge, and Federal Lands Recreation

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Enhancement Act (FLREA)<sup>2</sup> accounts to cover costs. NPS obligated \$2.45 million of the FLREA amounts to pay for the private entity with which the EOP contracted to plan and execute the event. NPS also used the Centennial Challenge appropriation account to pay for certain costs attributable to the Salute to America event.<sup>3</sup> NPS used the Operation of the National Park System account to fund the other Fourth of July events during 2016 through 2019.

The Department of the Army transferred funds from its annual appropriations for fiscal years 2016 through 2019 to NPS to support the Capitol Fourth and Memorial Day concerts. The Army entered into an agreement with NPS each fiscal year and transferred a lump sum to NPS. NPS allocated the funding for the two concerts each fiscal year.

The DC Government received an appropriation each fiscal year from the federal government for emergency planning and security costs in the District of Columbia that remains available until expended. This appropriation is for the costs of providing public safety at events related to the presence of the National Capital in the District of Columbia. According to DC Government officials, DC Government obligated the entire amount appropriated in fiscal year 2019 for the various events in the District of Columbia, including the Fourth of July events on the National Mall. DC Government officials stated that they did not request additional appropriations from Congress because they used funds from other appropriations to cover the cost of events exceeding the fiscal year 2019 appropriation.

Park Police reimbursed local law enforcement outside of the District of Columbia for assistance with security, traffic, and crowd control, costs which were estimated from \$85,000 to \$132,000 annually from 2016 through 2019. These costs are included as regular operations.

Finally, according to the officials at agencies we contacted, none of them delayed, deferred, or canceled any programs or activities as a result of resources being used for the Fourth of July events for 2016 through 2019.

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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the EOP, DOD, Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, Capitol Police, Architect of the Capitol, DC Government, SI, American Red Cross, Department of

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<sup>2</sup>16 U.S.C. § 6806.

<sup>3</sup>Pub. L. No. 116-6, 133 Stat. 13, 213 (Feb. 15, 2019); 54 U.S.C. § 101701.

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Energy, HHS, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Department of Transportation, and Department of Justice for review and comment. The EOP, DOD, Department of the Interior, DC Government, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and Department of Justice provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Department of Homeland Security, Capitol Police, Architect of the Capitol, SI, Department of Energy, HHS, and Department of Transportation informed us that they had no comments on the draft report and the American Red Cross did not provide comments.

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As agreed with your offices, unless you publically announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 8 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to 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 will be 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 [kociolek@gao.gov](mailto:kociolek@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 III.



Kristen Kociolek  
Director  
Financial Management and Assurance

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# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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Our objectives were to describe for the Fourth of July events on the National Mall for 2016 through 2019 (1) the total costs that federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions are estimated to have incurred and (2) the appropriations that were used to pay for the estimated federal costs; the extent, if any, to which the federal government has reimbursed costs incurred by state and local jurisdictions; and the extent, if any, to which federal agencies delayed, deferred, or canceled other programs or activities as a result of resources being used for Fourth of July 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 that contributed resources to the events. Agencies 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, Architect of the Capitol, District of Columbia Government, Smithsonian Institution, American Red Cross, Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Department of Transportation, and Department of Justice. In addition, we reviewed cost documents and other agency records to gain an understanding of the assets, including financial, physical, and human capital that each agency devoted to the events. In addition, we interviewed officials about estimated costs; any reimbursed costs; and any delayed, deferred, or canceled programs or activities.

The scope of our review consisted of estimated costs of the events and associated appropriations incurred by federal agencies and state and local jurisdictions. For the purposes of this engagement, we defined estimated costs as the costs that are directly traceable to the planning, production, and execution of the specific Fourth of July events on the National Mall. For example, we included the transportation costs of moving material, equipment, and supplies to the National Mall for Fourth of July events as well as personnel overtime and holiday pay expenses for federal employees. The costs also included contracts that various federal agencies awarded to private entities that were specifically attributable to the events.

We excluded costs that are not directly attributable to the planning, production, and execution of the specific Fourth of July events on the National Mall, such as salary costs for civilian federal employees and military personnel who performed duties during the events that would have been incurred regardless of whether the events took place. Also, we

excluded the costs to operate and maintain DOD aircraft that were used in the Salute to America event. According to DOD, the aircraft were existing DOD assets, and the flying hours associated with the event were used by DOD to meet annual pilot training requirements that were required regardless of the events on the Fourth of July. In addition, we excluded the cost associated with private entity parade participation and firework donations. Finally, cost estimates were provided by and attributable to each agency and department, and we did not independently verify the data during this audit.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2019 through June 2020 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.

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# Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Kristen Kociolek, (202) 512-2989 or [kociolek@gao.gov](mailto:kociolek@gao.gov)

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## 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, Anthony Clark, Marcia Carlsen, Elizabeth Erdmann, Pat Frey, Richard Geiger, Jason Kelly, Jason Kirwan, Quang Nguyen and Shahrzad Nikoo.

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