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The Cost of Presidential and Vice Presidential Political Travel

Item Type	House Minority Staff Report
Download date	2025-04-20 17:43:12
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14300/887



UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM — MINORITY STAFF
SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION
MARCH 2006

THE COST OF PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL POLITICAL TRAVEL

PREPARED FOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As political campaigns are gearing up around the country, the President and Vice President will be heavily involved in making campaign appearances and participating in fundraisers for candidates. In just the first few months of this year, they have already traveled to numerous campaign-related events.

The President and Vice President can legally participate in campaign and fundraising events for candidates. But when they do so, the taxpayer bears most of the cost. The President and Vice President travel across the country for political rallies and fundraisers in expensive military aircraft that cost tens of thousands of dollars per hour. The trips also involve costs associated with the use of Secret Service and transportation, food, and lodging for staff. Political campaigns reimburse the government for only a small fraction of these costs.

This report assesses the costs to the taxpayer when the President and Vice President travel for campaign appearances. It examines the costs that were borne by the taxpayer in 2002, the most recent election cycle in which there was no presidential election. The report analyzes the costs associated with presidential and vice presidential flights to campaign-related events on military aircraft. It does not take into account Secret Service costs, the costs of food and lodging for additional staff, the costs of backup or additional passenger planes that accompany the President, motorcade costs, or the costs of helicopter transport.

Major findings include:

- From January 1, 2002, through Election Day on November 5, 2002, the President and Vice President made a total of at least 83 campaign-related trips, involving at least 168 campaign-related stops, at an estimated cost of \$6.5 million in flight expenses.
- Political campaigns reimbursed the government for only an estimated \$198,000 of these costs. The taxpayer paid an estimated 97% of the flight expenses, an estimated net cost of \$6.3 million.
- During the 2002 campaign year, the President took at least 46 trips involving at least 82 destinations to conduct campaign-related activities, at an estimated cost of over \$4.7 million in flight expenses. Taking into account estimated reimbursements, the net cost to the taxpayer for these flights was an estimated \$4.6 million.
- During the 2002 campaign year, the Vice President took at least 37 trips involving at least 86 destinations to conduct campaign-related activities, at an estimated cost of \$1.8 million. Taking into account estimated

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reimbursements, the net cost to the taxpayer for these flights was \$1.7 million.

- If the President and Vice President in 2006 conduct campaign-related travel comparable to their 2002 campaign-related travel, the costs of flying the President and Vice President to 2006 campaign-related events are projected to be an estimated \$7.2 million. Taking into account estimated reimbursements, the projected net cost to the taxpayer for these flights will be an estimated \$7 million.

I. METHODOLOGY

This report estimates the costs of presidential and vice presidential travel based on (1) the total campaign-related flight time for each official; (2) the cost per hour of operating Air Force I and Air Force II, the military planes that transport the President and Vice President, and accompanying cargo planes; and (3) the reimbursements paid by political campaigns to the federal government.

A. Flight Hours for Presidential and Vice Presidential Travel

To determine flight time for the campaign-related travel of the President and Vice President in 2002, an itinerary of campaign-related travel was compiled based on data from the White House website,¹ press reports on 2002 campaign appearances by the President and Vice President,² and the reports the White House provides to the House Committee on Appropriations on presidential and vice presidential travel.³ If a trip involved several appearances on the same or consecutive days in the same region in areas a substantial distance from Washington, DC, or appearances on consecutive days in regions a substantial distance from each other, the report assumes that the President or Vice President did not return to Washington, DC, in between these appearances.

¹ See, e.g., The White House, *Press Gaggle by Ari Fleischer* (Oct. 4, 2002) (announcing that the President would attend a fundraiser in Massachusetts on October 4, 2002) (online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021004-6.html#1>).

² See, e.g., *VP, Other VIPs Flock to Maine to Boost Candidates in Key Races*, Portland Press Herald (Oct. 22, 2002) (noting that the Vice President had spoken at a fundraiser in South Portland, Maine, on October 21, 2002).

³ Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on Departments of Transportation and Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations for 2004*, 108th Congress, 1st Sess., Charts on Presidential and Vice Presidential Travel in FY 2002 and FY 2003 provided by the White House in response to Subcommittee questions, reprinted at pp. 628-633 and 724-729 (2003). In this report, the White House indicates whether travel to individual destinations involved an “official,” a “political,” or a “mixed” purpose.

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Distances between destinations on the itinerary were calculated and totaled.⁴ The flight time for presidential travel to campaign-related events was calculated by dividing the total miles traveled by the President by the cruising speed of Air Force I.⁵ The flight time for vice presidential travel was calculated by dividing the total miles traveled by the Vice President by the cruising speed of Air Force II.⁶ The President and Vice President likely flew many more hours than would be accounted for through this methodology, as their planes did not likely reach the cruising speed for all portions of all trips.

On trips involving both official and political activities, the miles traveled for political events was calculated by estimating the percent of events spent on political and official activities, and dividing the total miles traveled accordingly. For example, if the President traveled to Ohio for one fundraiser and one official speech, this report would count half of the miles traveled as political and half as official.

B. Cost of Presidential and Vice Presidential Flights Per Flight Hour

This report assumes that flight operating costs are \$56,518 per hour for Air Force One and \$14,552 per hour for Air Force Two. These figures are based on the per-hour cost figures cited by GAO for fiscal year 2000, adjusted for inflation.⁷

According to the Congressional Research Service, the President's domestic travel also involves the use of accompanying cargo planes.⁸ This report assumes one

⁴ Distances were determined using two Internet-based distance calculators: <http://www.indo.com/cgi-bin/dist> and <http://www.mapcrow.info/>. Staff cross-checked calculations from each of these web sites to ensure accuracy. The main departure airport for these trips, Andrews Air Force Base, located 20 miles outside Washington, DC, in Maryland, was considered "Washington, DC" for the purpose of this calculation.

⁵ The President flies on a VC-25. General Accounting Office, *Presidential Travel: DOD Airlift Cost for White House Foreign Travel*, Appendix I, at 10-11 (Aug. 2000) (GAO/NSIAD-00-209). The VC-25 plane has a speed of 630 miles per hour. Air Force, Fact Sheet on VC-25 – Air Force One (online at <http://www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?fsID=131>).

⁶ The name "Air Force Two" refers to whatever plane the Vice President is traveling in at a given time. According to the Air Force, the C-32 now serves as transportation for the Vice President, carrying the designation "Air Force Two" when the Vice President is on board. C-32 planes travel at a rate of 530 miles per hour. Air Force, *Fact Sheet on C-32* (online at <http://www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?fsID=90>).

⁷ According to GAO, the fiscal year 2000 per-hour operating costs for Air Force I (the VC-25) were \$54,100. General Accounting Office, *Presidential Travel: DOD Airlift Cost for White House Foreign Travel*, Appendix 5, Table 29, at p. 40 (Aug. 2000) (GAO/NSIAD-00-209). For fiscal year 2000, the per-hour operating costs of Air Force II (the C-32) were \$13,929. *Id.* at Appendix VII, Table 35, at p. 47. The inflation rate between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2002 was 4.47%. Inflation was calculated using data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index All Urban Consumers (CPI-U).

⁸ Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs*, 5 (May 6, 2004) (RS21835).

cargo plane accompanies the President on each trip at an operating cost per hour of \$6,960. This figure is based on the per-hour cost cited by GAO for fiscal year 2000 for the C-17 cargo plane, adjusted for inflation.⁹

C. Reimbursement for Political Trips

When the President and Vice President travel for campaign-related purposes, a political campaign reimburses the federal government for part of the travel costs. The amount of reimbursement is the cost that certain trip participants would have paid for commercial airfare for a comparable route.¹⁰ The White House calculates the reimbursement on a case-by-case basis.¹¹

Reimbursement is required for the President and Vice President. It is also required for staff who accompany the President and Vice President if the staff are also engaged in campaign-related activities. This report assumes that reimbursement is paid for five staff members for each political trip. This is likely to be an overestimate for many trips. A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article from 2002 reports that when the President traveled to Spokane, Washington, on behalf of Rep. George Nethercutt, Rep. Nethercutt's campaign reimbursed the government for only three staff members.¹²

The report calculated an estimated reimbursement rate for presidential travel by comparing the costs of operating Air Force One with the estimated reimbursements that were paid for five representative campaign-related trips taken by the President in 2002.¹³ The commercial airfare rates for these trips

⁹ According to GAO, the fiscal year 2000 per-hour operating costs for the C-17 plane was \$6,662. General Accounting Office, *Presidential Travel: DOD Airlift Cost for White House Foreign Travel*, Appendix 4, Table 26, at 38 (Aug. 2000) (GAO/NSIAD-00-209). The C-17 is the third cheapest of the four cargo planes that GAO reported are used on presidential trips. *Id.* According to the Air Force, the C-17 flies at 450 knots, which converts to 518 miles per hour. Air Force, *Fact Sheet on C-17* (online at: <http://www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?fsID=86>).

¹⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs*, 2 (May 6, 2004) (RS21835).

¹¹ *Id.* at 3.

¹² *Campaign 2004: Bush Visit Is a Bargain for Nethercutt Camp*, *Seattle Post Intelligencer* (June 16, 2004). During the time period covered by this report, the Vice President (but not the President) reported to the House Committee on Appropriations the number of staff who accompanied the Vice President on political and "mixed" trips. Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on Departments of Transportation and Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations for 2004*, 108th Congress, 1st Sess., Chart on Vice Presidential Travel in FY 2002 and FY 2003 provided by the White House in response to Subcommittee questions, reprinted at pp. 724-729 (2003). The average number of staff per trip was five. Not all of these staff would necessarily be engaged in campaign-related activities, however. The Vice President did not report the number of staff for whom reimbursement was paid.

¹³ The five trips used to calculate the reimbursement rate for the President are Washington, DC, to New York, New York; to Houston, Texas; to Boston, Massachusetts; and to Atlanta, Georgia; and Phoenix, Arizona, to Washington, DC.

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were based on data from the Department of Transportation.¹⁴ This calculation produced an estimated reimbursement rate for presidential travel of 2.3%.

A similar methodology was used to calculate an estimated reimbursement rate for vice presidential travel. This calculation produced an estimated reimbursement rate for vice presidential travel of 5.7%.¹⁵

II. FINDINGS

The 2006 campaign season is already well underway, and, as in past years, the President and Vice President will be traveling around the country for campaign events and fundraisers. Indeed, in just the past few weeks, the President attended a reception for Rep. Chris Chocola in Mishawaka, Indiana,¹⁶ and a fundraiser for Senator Mike DeWine in suburban Cincinnati,¹⁷ while the Vice President traveled to Boca Raton, Florida, to campaign for Rep. Clay Shaw¹⁸ and to the Chicago area to speak at a fundraiser for congressional candidate Peter Roskam.¹⁹

When the President and Vice President travel to campaign events, they use military planes that cost tens of thousands of dollars per trip.²⁰ Based on analysis of the presidential and vice presidential flight costs in the 2002 campaign season, the projected costs of presidential and vice presidential flights for campaign-related events in 2006 is approximately \$7.2 million. Factoring in potential reimbursement to the Treasury by political campaigns, the projected net cost to the taxpayer of presidential and vice presidential campaign-related flights is approximately \$7.0 million.

¹⁴ These rates were based Department of Transportation reports regarding 2002 commercial airfare. U.S. Department of Transportation, *Domestic Airline Fares Consumer Report, Second Quarter 2002 Passenger and Fare Information* (Dec. 2002); U.S. Department of Transportation, *Domestic Airline Fares Consumer Report, Third Quarter 2002 Passenger and Fare Information* (July 2003); U.S. Department of Transportation, *Domestic Airline Fares Consumer Report, Fourth Quarter 2002 Passenger and Fare Information* (Oct. 2003); U.S. Department of Transportation, *Domestic Airline Fares Consumer Report, First Quarter 2003 Passenger and Fare Information* (Jan. 2004) (all available at <http://ostpxweb.dot.gov/aviation/index.html>).

¹⁵ The five trips used to calculate the reimbursement rate for the Vice President are Washington, DC, to Cincinnati, Ohio; to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; to Minneapolis, Minnesota; to Portland, Oregon; and to Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁶ The White House, *President's Remarks at Chocola for Congress Reception* (Feb. 23, 2006) (online at www.whitehouse.gov).

¹⁷ *Bush, Cheney, to Be in Ohio on March 20*, Columbus Dispatch (Mar. 10, 2006).

¹⁸ *Cheney Visits Boca Raton to Stump for Shaw*, Bradenton Herald (Mar. 7, 2006).

¹⁹ *Cheney Rallies Support for Republican in Suburban Chicago Congressional Race* (Mar. 14, 2006).

²⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs* (May 6, 2004).

A. Flight Costs for 2002 Campaign Trips

In 2002, the President and Vice President took at least 83 trips involving at least 168 destinations to conduct campaign-related activities. The total distance covered by these trips was over 111,000 miles, and the total estimated flight costs for these trips was \$6.5 million.²¹

The President took at least 46 trips involving 82 destinations to conduct campaign-related activities. The total distance the President covered in these trips was more than 45,000 miles, at an estimated Air Force I flight cost of \$4.1 million. The estimated cost of the accompanying cargo plane was \$615,000, bringing the total estimated flight costs to \$4.7 million.

The Vice President took at least 37 trips involving 86 destinations to conduct campaign-related activities. The total distance the Vice President covered in these trips was 66,000 miles, at an estimated flight cost of \$1.8 million.

Some of these trips involved traveling from Washington, DC, to just one destination, and back to Washington, DC. For example, on February 11, 2002, the President traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, attended a fundraising dinner for Governor Scott McCallum, and returned to Washington, DC, without additional political stops.²²

Many of the trips, however, involved multiple stops. For example, on September 26 and 27, 2002, the President traveled to four cities in three different states for political events, including a September 26 Cornyn for Senate reception in Houston, Texas, a September 27 Bob Beauprez for Congress lunch in Denver, Colorado, a September 27 speech with Rep. Rick Renzi at the Flagstaff, Arizona, fairgrounds, and a September 27 dinner in Phoenix, Arizona, in support of Matt Salmon for Governor and Rick Renzi for Congress.²³ On July 18 and 19, 2002, the Vice President traveled to four cities in three different states for political events, including a July 18 event for Senator Jim Gerlach in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, a July 18 reception for congressional candidate Tim Murphy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a July 19 luncheon for Senatorial candidate Jon Cornyn

²¹ If cargo planes are included, the total distance is over 157,000 miles.

²² *President Says Health Care Plan Will Keep Nation 'On Cutting Edge of Medicine,'* Associated Press (Feb. 12, 2002). Only half of the expenses of this trip can be attributed to political travel because the President made an official stop while in Wisconsin, making a speech on health care at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

²³ *President Drums up Support for Cornyn,* Dallas Morning News (Sept. 27, 2002); *Bush Pushes Homeland Security Issue,* Associated Press (Sept. 27, 2002).

in Houston, Texas, and a July 19 fundraiser for Senator Saxby Chambliss in Macon, Georgia.²⁴

B. Adjusted Flight Costs for 2002

Federal appropriations law provides that appropriated funds may be used only for the purposes for which they have been appropriated.²⁵ As a result, various Administrations have developed guidelines to determine the amount of reimbursement that must be paid to the federal government when political travel is conducted with official resources.²⁶ When Air Force I and Air Force II are used for trips with political purposes, political campaigns must reimburse the federal government at a rate based on the comparable commercial airfare for the route traveled. When a trip involves both political and official purposes, the airfare reimbursement is discounted based on a formula that factors in the percentage of time spent on official versus political activity.²⁷

As discussed in the methodology section, this report estimates that the rate of reimbursement for campaign-related trips by the President is approximately 2.3% of the costs of Air Force I. Factoring in this reimbursement rate, the estimated net cost to the taxpayer of the President's political flights in 2002 was \$4.6 million.

The estimated rate of reimbursement for campaign-related trips on Air Force II by the Vice President and his accompanying staff is approximately 5.7% of the costs of Air Force II. Factoring in this reimbursement rate, the estimated net cost to the taxpayer of the Vice President's political flights in 2002 was \$1.7 million.

The total estimated reimbursement recovered by the federal government for presidential and vice presidential political flights in 2002 was \$198,000, and the total net cost to the taxpayer was \$6.3 million. The taxpayer thus paid an estimated 97% of the flight expenses.

C. Projected 2006 Flight Costs for Presidential and Vice Presidential Political Travel

Assuming that the President and Vice President engage in political travel in 2006 comparable to their political travel in 2002, the projected cost to the taxpayer of

²⁴ *Cheney Appears at Cornyn Fundraiser*, Associated Press (July 19, 2002); *Cheney: Business Reforms Will Restore Confidence*, Associated Press (July 18, 2002); *Vice President to Speak for Chambliss in Macon*, Associate Press (July 11, 2002);

²⁵ 31 U.S.C. § 1301.

²⁶ See Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs*, 2-3 (May 6, 2004).

²⁷ *Id.* at 3.

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their political flights in 2006 is \$7.2 million.²⁸ Adjusting this figure to account for estimated reimbursements, the projected net cost to the taxpayer in 2006 is \$7 million.

D. Flight Costs Are Only a Portion of Total Taxpayer Costs

The cost estimates for presidential and vice presidential political flights do not capture the entire cost to the taxpayer of presidential and vice presidential trips for campaign-related purposes. For example, a substantial additional cost of the trips involves costs associated with the Secret Service and other personnel that accompany the President and Vice President as “official” travelers.²⁹

Another additional cost is backup planes that accompany the President on domestic travel, and additional passenger aircraft that may accompany the President if the number of accompanying staff is significant.³⁰ The President and Vice President also incur costs traveling between airports and campaign events in helicopters and motorcades.³¹ Further, the helicopters that transport the President and Vice President to and from the airport at the beginning and end of trips cost thousands of additional dollars per trip.³²

²⁸ This figure is the total political flight costs for the President and Vice President for 2002 adjusted for inflation.

²⁹ Congressional Research Service, *Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs*, at 5 (May 6, 2004).

³⁰ *Id.* at 5.

³¹ See, e.g., *Bush's Dual Mission: Cash and Caring; Visiting State to Support Republicans in Pivotal Races, President also Calls for Increased Volunteerism*, Hartford Courant (Apr. 10, 2002) (describing a campaign-related trip by President Bush involving helicopter travel from JFK International Airport to the Bridgeport, Connecticut area and motorcade travel to Greenwich, Connecticut).

³² *The Cost of Presidential Travel Is Anyone's Guess*, Washington Post (Oct. 29, 2002). Toward the end of the 2002 campaign season, the *Washington Post* did a “back of the envelope” estimate of the total costs of presidential campaign travel for 2002, which estimated it cost “roughly \$15.7 million.” *Id.*