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Trapped by Waste

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WASTE REPORT for August 8, 2016

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Outside the DC area, few people have probably even heard of Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, let alone taken in a concert there. However, for those inside the Beltway (metaphorically speaking¹), Wolf Trap is a well-known venue for a variety of summer concerts. **Unfortunately, whether you have heard of it or not, Wolf Trap is trapping nearly \$600,000 of taxpayer money for wasteful, DC-insider hypocrisy.**

On its surface, Wolf Trap is structured to protect taxpayers. As a kind of public-private partnership, the National Park Service maintains the park (which includes hiking trails and the like), while the non-profit Wolf Trap Foundation is “responsible for artistic programming, public relations, marketing, box office functions, and providing stagehands and certain other employees who are directly related to the presentation of performing arts.”²

It seems like a reasonable and clear division between the national park and its use as a venue for stage entertainment. However, **the line seems to have recently been blurred, as the Park Service is handing over \$594,000 to the Foundation to offset some of the cost of operations and production.**³

Do not blame the Park Service! Their hands are tied. This money comes from a \$2.2 million earmark for the National Capital Area Performing Arts program, which funds (or subsidizes) a variety of concerts and entertainment around Washington. In fact, the National Park Service has unsuccessfully asked Congress to eliminate this earmark.⁴ While Congress ignored those requests, many members may have just not known the earmark was there. You see, the earmark is not in the nearly 900-page text of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (H.R. 2029)* or the more than 200 pages of committee reports accompanying the bill. The earmark is on page 16 of the 109-page explanatory statement for division G of the Appropriations Act. **Vague and hard to find - almost the definition of “snuck in.”**

In the case of Wolf Trap, it even gets worse. The purpose of the funds is to “**pay a portion of the costs of the union stagehands that work backstage....**”⁵ So, **DC’s most-connected people, many of whom are strong union supporters, are using taxpayer money to alleviate themselves and fellow Washingtonians of paying union prices.**

The FSO subcommittee calculates that if concertgoers had to pay the full cost of Wolf Trap concerts with unionized stage hands, ticket prices would increase by only about 4 percent.⁶ That comes out to roughly \$5 a ticket for the most expensive seats.⁷ But even if the increase were 40 percent or 400 percent, that cost should be paid by the patron who chooses to take in a show, not the taxpayer who has no choice whatsoever.

In case you are wondering, **about 84 average Americans a year have to turn over their hard-earned money in taxes so Washingtonians can save \$5 on concert tickets.** By the way, **Fairfax County, VA, where Wolf Trap is located, is the second wealthiest county in America, with a median income over \$110,000. Bordering Fairfax are the #1 (Loudoun - \$117k), #6 (Arlington - \$101k), and #8 (Montgomery, MD - \$97k) wealthiest counties in America.**⁸

¹ Wolf Trap is actually a few miles outside the Beltway off the Dulles Toll Rd.

² *Wolf Trap Performing Arts Program Support*; National Park Service; Washington, DC. July 2016. Announcement Number P16AS00355 – Amount corrected via Park Department correspondence with FSO

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/FY-2016-Greenbook.pdf>

⁵ *Wolf Trap Performing Arts Program Support*; National Park Service; Washington, DC. July 2016. Announcement Number P16AS00355

⁶ Calculated using Wolf Trap’s 2015 Annual Report, where ticket sales totaled \$14,654,313 <https://issuu.com/wolftrapfoundation/docs/2015-wt-annual-report>

⁷ Based on a Prime Orchestra ticket to the Ricky Martin concert scheduled for August 24th, 2016.

⁸ http://purchase.tickets.com/buy/TicketPurchase?orgid=44689&pid=8234880&mkt_code=WOLFTRAP&_ga=1.186660072.1332160455.1469634656

⁸ <http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2015/09/20/the-top-10-richest-counties-in-the-united-states.aspx>