

Presidential inaugural ceremony doesn't come cheap

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Barack Obama is sworn in January of 2009 to become the 44th president of the United States. Photo: Washington Post photo by Jonathan Newton

Inaugurations are expensive. They are really expensive.

The peaceful transfer of power comes with a massive price tag: When all the bills are added up, the 2017 celebration will cost an estimated \$175 million to \$200 million. That total includes the official parties and dinners, the concert, the swearing-in at the Capitol, the parade and the inaugural balls. The amount also includes all the police, military and security staff required to keep everyone safe.

About \$70 million will come from private donations, and the taxpayers will pay for the rest.

The Critics Cry Every Four Years

This process happens every four years, and every time, critics cry about all the money spent. The truth is that both parties, Republicans and Democrats, spend about the same amount for each celebration.

The cost breaks down into two parts: The bills that the Presidential Inaugural Committee pays, and the bills that the federal government, or the taxpayers, cover.

The committee pays for everything surrounding the swearing-in ceremony – all the glamorous parts of the inauguration. Events this time include a candlelight dinner with the president- and vice president-elect, a lunch with Cabinet appointees, a concert and the inaugural balls. Inaugural packages start at \$25,000 and go up to \$1 million. VIP donors usually buy the most tickets and get the best seats.

President-elect Donald Trump's inaugural committee has not yet announced how much it hopes to raise. Anywhere from \$65 million to \$75 million is a reasonable guess, based on past years. People who lobby the government to enact legislation are not allowed to give donations, but corporations can give up to \$1 million. There isn't a limit for individuals. According to committee spokesman Boris Epshteyn, the name of anyone who donates \$200 or more must be reported to the Federal Election Commission within 90 days of the inauguration. Any money not used will be donated to charity.

The Price Of Inaugurations Keeps Rising

Like everything else, the price of inaugurations keeps going up.

For President Barack Obama's first inauguration in 2009, his committee raised a record \$53 million in private donations, although the president-elect refused to accept money from special interest groups, corporations or political action committees. Individuals could donate up to \$50,000. In 2013, after the most expensive presidential campaign in history, Obama's committee raised \$44 million and allowed corporate gifts and individual gifts of \$250,000.

Those numbers are in line with previous inaugurations. Supporters of George W. Bush raised about \$40 million for his 2001 inauguration, and \$42 million in 2005 for his second; Bill Clinton's inaugural committees solicited \$33 million in 1993 and \$30 million in 1997. George H.W. Bush raised \$30 million in 1989. The committees for Ronald Reagan pulled together \$19 million in 1981 and \$20 million in 1985.

Members Of Congress Get To Distribute Tickets

The actual swearing-in on Jan. 20 is hosted by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, costs slightly over \$1 million and is paid for by the federal government. This includes the construction of the elaborate stage on the west side of the Capitol grounds and the official congressional luncheon for the new president and vice-president. (Tickets for the outdoor ceremony are distributed by the members of the Senate and the House, typically to people in their voting districts.)

But the biggest share of the cost, by far, comes from the extensive security network required, transportation and emergency services, and cleanup. The FBI and police spent \$115 million in 2005 and \$124 million in 2009, according to media reports. (The District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland are reimbursed for most of their expenses.)

It's hard to know exactly how much taxpayers pay. The total amount includes the salaries for all the local police forces, emergency staff and federal employees who have Inauguration Day off.

Regardless of who is sworn in as president, inaugurations are a huge boost for local businesses. Between hotels, restaurants, caterers, limo companies and more, the celebration is expected to bring several hundred million visitors to the Washington, D.C., area, although exact revenue numbers aren't available, according to Destination DC, the city's official convention and tourism arm.

Quiz

- 1 All four selections below help make the claim that individuals and businesses show their support for a president-elect by donating money to the inaugural celebration.
- Which of the following is the STRONGEST piece of evidence to support the claim?
- (A) Inaugural packages start at \$25,000 and go up to \$1 million. VIP donors usually buy the most tickets and get the best seats.
 - (B) People who lobby the government to enact legislation are not allowed to give donations, but corporations can give up to \$1 million. There isn't a limit for individuals.
 - (C) According to committee spokesman Boris Epshteyn, the name of anyone who donates \$200 or more must be reported to the Federal Election Commission within 90 days of the inauguration. Any money not used will be donated to charity.
 - (D) In 2013, after the most expensive presidential campaign in history, Obama's committee raised \$44 million and allowed corporate gifts and individual gifts of \$250,000.
- 2 Which of the following options BEST supports the idea that the inauguration is beneficial for more than just the president-elect?
- (A) Tickets for the outdoor ceremony are distributed by the members of the Senate and the House, typically to people in their voting districts.
 - (B) But the biggest share of the cost, by far, comes from the extensive security network required, transportation and emergency services, and cleanup.
 - (C) The total amount includes the salaries for all the local police forces, emergency staff and federal employees who have Inauguration Day off.
 - (D) Between hotels, restaurants, caterers, limo companies and more, the celebration is expected to bring several hundred million visitors to the Washington, D.C., area...

- 3 Which of these details would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
- (A) Inaugurations are expensive. They are really expensive.
 - (B) The peaceful transfer of power comes with a massive price tag: When all the bills are added up, the 2017 celebration will cost an estimated \$175 million to \$200 million.
 - (C) That total includes the official parties and dinners, the concert, the swearing-in at the Capitol, the parade and the inaugural balls.
 - (D) The cost breaks down into two parts: The bills that the Presidential Inaugural Committee pays, and the bills that the federal government, or the taxpayers, cover.
- 4 The central idea of the article is developed by:
- (A) explaining how money is raised for inaugurations and what the money is spent on.
 - (B) explaining the history of inaugural celebrations in the United States.
 - (C) explaining the high cost of qualified security teams and police.
 - (D) explaining the high bills created from numerous hotel stays and restaurant meals.