



Fact Sheet

GAO: PRESIDENT'S 2005 SOCIAL SECURITY TOUR COST TAXPAYERS MILLIONS

Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

In 2005, the Bush Administration launched an initiative to increase support for the President's efforts to privatize Social Security, including campaign-style events featuring the President and top administration officials and the creation of a "Social Security Information Center" in the Department of the Treasury. On April 5, 2005, Rep. Waxman asked the Government Accountability Office to assess the costs to the taxpayer of this White House initiative.

After long delays, due in part to the refusal of the White House to cooperate with the investigation, the key findings of the GAO investigation are:

- **Bush Administration officials participated in 228 public speaking events in 2005 related to the Social Security reform effort.** These included 40 events with the President, 7 with the Vice President, 10 with other White House officials, 73 with officials from the Social Security Administration, and 39 with officials from the Department of the Treasury.
- **At a minimum, the White House effort in support of privatizing Social Security cost more than \$2.8 million.** This includes more than \$1.6 million in costs for staging the events, more than \$800,000 for Air Force One and Air Force Two travel, and more than \$200,000 for the creation of the Treasury Department's privatization war room and website. This \$2.8 million is an underestimate of the true costs, as it does not include the cost of staff time, Secret Service protection, and other expenses.
- **Single events with the President can cost over \$100,000 to stage.** A February 3, 2005, event with President Bush in Great Falls, Montana, cost \$104,588 to stage. The event in Montana was part of a two-day swing across the country, with President Bush holding additional events in North Dakota, Nebraska, Arkansas, and Florida. The combined cost for staging those five events was \$382,700, excluding staffing, security, and other expenses.
- **The White House refused to provide basic information in response to GAO's requests.** The White House ignored GAO's request for information for eight months and then provided only a small amount of the information requested. This refusal to cooperate delayed release of the report and prevented GAO from testing the validity of many of the reported costs. As GAO states in the report, "GAO has a statutory right to this information," but "given the nature of this request and the amounts involved, GAO decided not to pursue this records access issue."