

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3215

May 7, 2026

The Honorable Caryl Bryzmialkiewicz
Acting Inspector General
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Inspector General Bryzmialkiewicz,

I write to you with deep concern regarding the troubling report about a fountain maintenance contract awarded by the National Park Service (NPS) to Clark Construction under a no-bid “urgency” exemption. This authority appears to have been invoked in a manner that raises serious questions about fiscal responsibility, transparency, and adherence to standard procurement practices.¹

In 2022, the National Park Service received an independent cost estimate of \$3.3 million for this project.² Yet, when the contract was ultimately awarded in January 2026³ to Clark Construction, it began at \$11.7 million. The contract was later increased to \$17.4 million, representing a staggering 427% increase over the original 2022 independent estimate.⁴ The same contractor who made the 2022 estimate reportedly observed that the Administration’s contract “just added a bunch of money onto [the estimate],” a characterization that warrants rigorous scrutiny by your office.⁵

The justification for these escalating costs is, at best, inconsistent. The NPS attributed a 27% increase to inflation, followed by an additional 24% increase, also due to inflation.⁶ Applying inflation adjustments twice is highly irregular. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that construction prices rose approximately 21% between 2022 and the time of contract award,⁷ a figure that falls far short of the multiple increases applied here. Internal documents further suggest that contracting officials employed unconventional methods, including a flat 50% increase for “schedule compression.” Experts in federal procurement note that expedited timelines are typically priced through itemized cost adjustments, not broad, unexplained increases.⁸

¹ Andrew A. Fahrenthold et al., *Firm Building Trump’s Ballroom Got a Secret No-Bid Contract for a Nearby Job*, N.Y. Times (Apr. 25, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/25/us/politics/lafayette-park-fountains-trump-contract.html>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

Equally concerning is the use of a no-bid contract under the urgency clause.⁹ Over the past decade, less than 1% of NPS contract spending has relied on this statute.¹⁰ The circumstances of this project do not appear to meet any reasonable definition of urgency. With all the serious issues the American people face, I do not consider fixing two fountains to be urgent and consider this use of the statute to be unjustifiable.

After learning about these alleged cost overruns and unusual use of a no-bid contract in a federal construction project, I find this instance hypocritical to the President's outcry regarding the alleged cost overruns tied to the rebuilding of the Federal Reserve buildings. An issue that prompted President Trump to launch an investigation into Chairman Powell, which was ended on April 24th due to a total lack of evidence.¹¹ This hypocrisy raises serious concerns about selective outrage and this Administration's politicization of oversight. The American people deserve a government that applies standards evenly. Not one that bends to serve the interests or impulses of a single person.

Furthermore, I strongly urge you to investigate the following:

- What specific factors justified the extraordinary increase in project costs, and how do these align with standard federal contracting principles?
- Why did the National Park Service deviate from typical competitive bidding procedures, and what criteria were used to invoke the urgency clause?
- How does the agency reconcile these decisions with the Administration's overall "goal" to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer funds?
- Please gather and provide an itemized list of costs covered by the 50% funding increase due to schedule compression.

At a time when public trust in government institutions is at a low point, adherence to transparency, accountability, and fiscal discipline is not optional. It is essential. This matter demands thorough investigation and prompt clarification.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ritchie Torres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress

⁹ 41 U.S.C. § 3304(a)(2).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 1

¹¹ Christopher Rugaber & Eric Tucker, *Justice Department Drops Criminal Probe of Fed Chair Powell, Likely Clearing the Way for Warsh*, AP News (Apr. 24, 2026). <https://apnews.com/article/federal-reserve-investigation-powell-justice-department-28d04cc0d99cda25cea69931f65e25d3>.