

September 21, 1999

Government Auditor Finds Just 3 Recent Clinton Trips Cost \$72 Million

Clinton's Foreign Travel: Excessive or Abusive??

The President's foreign travel is well reported, but its costs are largely unavailable. Because this president has set records as the most traveled president in American history, three U.S. Senators requested the government's official auditor to examine some of the recent travel expenses he has incurred. Senate Republican Policy Committee Chairman Larry Craig, and Senators Jeff Sessions and Craig Thomas last year requested the General Accounting Office (GAO) to examine the costs of just three recent foreign trips taken by President Clinton in 1998 — his travel to Chile, China, and to six countries in Africa. The results of this study, released today by GAO, suggest that Clinton's travel has gone past the level of excessive to that of abusive.

Just those three trips cost the American taxpayer at least \$72 million — with the Africa trip alone accounting for \$42.8 million. Not only did they seriously affect the taxpayer's wallet, these three trips seriously affected America's defense. Fully 84 percent of the \$72-million price tag came from the DOD budget. For example, the cost per hour to fly Air Force One, the president's personal plane, is \$34,400. Of course, the \$72-million price tag paid for a lot more than just flying President Clinton. It also paid for 297 military missions largely for the ferrying back and forth of some 2,400 people and necessary equipment working — sometimes months in advance — to assure smooth travel for the President. The trip to Africa alone involved 10 advance trips by military planes and the travel of 904 DOD personnel — the equivalent of a U.S. Army battalion. [Note that GAO generally defines a "mission" as including either a round-trip flight between the home base and the foreign destination, or travel that includes multiple flight segments, such as from points A to B to C and back to A.]

As costly as the tab for these three presidential trips is, it does not measure the full cost to the taxpayer. GAO did not tabulate the additional costs of President Clinton's security out-of-country — these were not requested for security purposes. Neither were the agency planning expenses included. Nor did GAO add in the cost of paying the military and other personnel who accompanied or prepared the way for President Clinton (despite the economic fact that these personnel would have been doing some other job if not on travel). Rather, only the additional, or "incremental," cost that the President's travel entailed is represented by the GAO figures. It is, then, by any description a conservative estimate.

At the same time that President Clinton was using the Pentagon as his personal travel agent, he was also cutting back its budget. Every year he has been in office, President Clinton has cut the military budget. Simultaneously, he has broadened the military's role beyond the traditional

one of defending America to peacekeeping and “nation building.”

It is not an exaggeration to say that President Clinton’s travel has been excessive: he already holds countless records for presidential foreign travel — Most Countries Visited (59), Total Foreign Travel Days (186), and Most Days of Foreign Travel Per Year (27.6). A synopsis of GAO’s report follows.

Africa: March 22 through April 2, 1998

President Clinton visited Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Botswana, and Senegal. Ten separate advance trips were required over a three-month interval and 1,300 individuals traveled either with or in support of President Clinton. According to GAO, “the purpose of the trip was to (1) help reshape the way Americans think about Africa; (2) show U.S. support for emerging democracies; (3) promote U.S. investment, trade, and economic growth in Africa; (4) promote education; and (5) promote conflict resolution and human rights.”

- While “promote U.S. investment, trade, and economic growth in Africa” and “promote education” were stated goals of the trip, not one official from the Department of Education and just three people from the Department of Commerce traveled to Africa. Those who did make the trip included 205 members of the Executive Office of the President.
- DOD spent about \$37.7 million in support of the trip. DOD flew 98 airlift missions and 110 aerial refueling missions, transported 13 Army and Marine Corps helicopters, established at least four separate maintenance support teams, and established temporary medical evacuation units in five countries. DOD sent 904 of the 1,302 people who traveled to Africa and paid 88 percent of the trip’s \$42.8 million cost.

Chile: April 16 through April 20, 1998

President Clinton visited Chile (according to GAO) “to attend the second Summit of the Americas and hold bilateral meetings with the President of Chile Agenda items at the summit included a discussion of the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas, the promotion of democracy, and the eradication of poverty in the Americas.”

- While “the eradication of poverty in the Americas” was a major objective of the trip, just one person from (Agency for International Development) A.I.D. traveled to Chile. At the same time, 109 members of the Executive Office of the President made the trip.
- “Five advance teams of State, White House, Secret Service, and/or DOD officials made five trips from November 1997 through April 1998 to prepare for the President’s arrival.”
- DOD sent 193 of the 592 people who traveled to Chile and paid \$8.8 million of the trip’s \$10.5 million cost — 84 percent. DOD’s expenses included 24 airlift missions and nine aerial refueling missions.

China: June 25 through July 3, 1998

The GAO reports that President Clinton visited China “to conduct bilateral talks with the President of China and for other purposes. . . . Issues discussed were security, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, economics and trade, energy and environment, science and technology, and law enforcement.”

- While “economics and trade” and “energy and environment” were agenda items, just two people from the Department of Energy and just nine from the Department of Commerce traveled to China — along with 186 members of the Executive Office of the President.
- Even more interesting is that while “law enforcement” was also an agenda item, not a single individual from the Department of Justice accompanied the President. In contrast, when law enforcement was on the Chile agenda, the Attorney General herself and 13 other individuals from the Department of Justice traveled there.
- “Eight separate teams from the State Department, White House, Secret Service, and/or DOD made advance trips to Beijing, Xi’an, Shanghai, Guilin, and Hong Kong from April 1998 through June 1998.” DOD sent 123 of the 510 people who traveled to China and paid 74 percent (\$14 million) of the trip’s \$18.8 million cost. DOD’s expenses included 36 airlift missions and 7 aerial refueling missions.

More Trips: “*Never found a place in the world he wouldn’t want to go.*”

And more to come: According to the Associated Press (Terence Hunt; 9/7/99), President Clinton will make his fifth presidential trip to Canada on October 8, and “a four-nation swing just before Thanksgiving to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Italy.”

Next year will be just as scenic for the President. “The hottest speculation is that he will visit Vietnam, a place he struggled to avoid when he was draft-age,” reports Hunt. China is also a possibility, as “aides note that the president told the Chinese women’s soccer team he would like to go to China again.” The President has visited (by RPC’s count) 59 different countries and territories (many of them more than once), but new to his “Places I’ve Visited” list mentioned as possibilities by the Associated Press would be India, Pakistan, Brunei, Kosovo and Antarctica, as well as Vietnam, Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria. To date the President’s record of 186 foreign travel days is more than double that of any other U.S. president. [RPC has available a set of charts detailing Clinton’s travel: see RPC’s “Excessive Clinton Travel Tab = Taxpayer Abuse,” 9/21/99. Note that we compare days and countries traveled to among other presidents, but GAO is unable to prepare a cost estimate of travel of previous administrations for comparison purposes.]

The Associated Press story included a candid quote from presidential counselor Doug Sosnik: “This is a guy that has never met an idea that he doesn’t like, never met a person who’s not interesting and never found a place in the world he wouldn’t want to go.” As the GAO study shows, he also never met a tab he didn’t want the taxpayer to pick up.

RPC Staff Contact: Dr. J.T. Young, 224-2946