

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

February 16, 2017

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We are writing today to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review of President Trump's activities at Mar-a-Lago, the private Palm Beach club that the President has dubbed his "Winter White House."<sup>1</sup> We are deeply concerned by recent reports that the President, his staff, and the Japanese Prime Minister discussed national security matters on "full view to fellow diners," and reviewed potentially sensitive national security material in apparent violation of security protocols.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we are concerned about the expenditure of taxpayer funds at Mar-a-Lago by the Secret Service and other government officials associated with the President.

On February 11, 2017, President Trump announced that he and the First Lady were "hosting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Mrs. Abe at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla."<sup>3</sup> That evening, North Korea announced that it had successfully fired a ballistic missile.<sup>4</sup> President Trump reportedly communicated with staff about the launch via a cell phone while sitting with Prime Minister Abe in the middle of a public dining room. Following the call, the President's dinner reportedly "morphed into a strategy session" to discuss the missile launch.<sup>5</sup> In addition to making sensitive phone calls in the dining room, aides reportedly used the camera lights on their cell phones to help President Trump and Prime Minister Abe view the documents — all while surrounded by Mar-a-Lago club members and wait staff.<sup>6</sup> By conducting

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Caputo, "Trump dubs Mar-a-Lago the new 'Winter White House,'" *Politico* (January 18, 2017) (online at <http://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2017/01/trump-dubs-mar-a-lago-the-new-winter-white-house-108841>).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Liptak, "At Mar-a-Lago, Trump Tackles crisis diplomacy at close range," *CNN Politics* (February 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/12/politics/trump-shinzo-abe-mar-a-lago-north-korea/>).

<sup>3</sup> Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "Melania and I are hosting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Mrs. Abe at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla. They are a wonderful couple!" *Twitter* (February 11, 2017, 5:33a.m) (online at <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/830409522397184000>).

<sup>4</sup> "North Korea fires ballistic missile, challenging Trump," *Al Jazeera* (February 12, 2017) (online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-test-trump-170212035411387.html>).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Liptak, "At Mar-a-Lago, Trump tackles crisis diplomacy at close range," *CNN Politics* (February 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/12/politics/trump-shinzo-abe-mar-a-lago-north-korea/>).

<sup>6</sup> Natasha Bertrand, "Trump's aides appeared to brief him on North Korea's recent missile test in front of Mar-a-Lago members," *Business Insider* (February 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-north-korea-mar-a-lago-meeting-photos-2017-2>).

discussions in this manner, the President enabled private citizens without security clearances to potentially overhear sensitive or classified national security information.

Additionally, a guest at Mar-a-Lago posted a photograph of himself with a military aide carrying the nuclear codes on his social media account writing, “This is Rick... He carries the ‘football’ [—]The nuclear football,” or the President’s emergency satchel that would be used “to authorize a nuclear attack.”<sup>7</sup>

President Trump’s recent visit to Mar-a-Lago also raises concerns regarding his Administration’s use of taxpayer funds. The President’s first trip to Mar-a-Lago after the inauguration cost taxpayers an estimated \$3 million.<sup>8</sup> The President returned to Mar-a-Lago the following weekend and is reportedly spending his third straight weekend in Palm Beach as well.<sup>9</sup> When the President stays at Mar-a-Lago, he is accompanied by members of his staff, the Secret Service, and military aides. It is not clear how many of these individuals incur travel and room expenses using taxpayer dollars and if they are being charged fair and appropriate rates.

President Trump’s tax attorney has stated in the past that the President will “voluntarily donate all profits from foreign government payments made to his hotels to the United States Treasury” to avoid the appearance of self-dealing and prevent a violation of the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> According to the Administration, Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Mar-a-Lago was a “gift” from the President. However, it is unclear how the President or the Club has accounted for this “gift,” or how the profits from future foreign visits will be addressed. And we have no way of knowing whether the President has been or will follow up on his promise to donate his hotel profits to the U.S. Treasury.

With these concerns in mind, we ask that your review address several issues, including potential violations of protocol and security precautions related to President Trump’s handling of national security information. Because of the national security concerns raised by the President’s behavior, we ask that you begin this review as quickly as possible. Below, you will find specific questions that we respectfully ask the GAO to assess:

1. Have President Trump and his Administration appropriately followed rules, protocol, and precedent for communicating with foreign governments and handling classified information while the President is conducting business outside of the White House, including at the Mar-a-Lago Club?

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<sup>7</sup> Chris Spargo, “‘This is Rick...he carries the ‘football’’: Palm Beach actor posts photo of himself with military aid ‘carrying the nuclear codes’ in a set of remarkably candid snaps taken at Mar-a-Lago,” *Daily Mail* (February 13, 2017) (online at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4220530/Man-posts-photo-military-aide-nuclear-codes.html>).

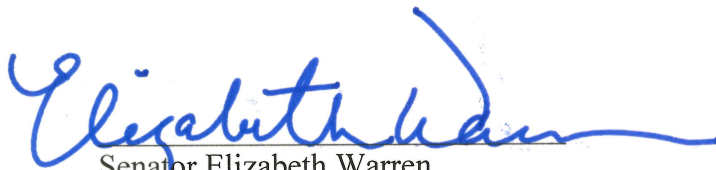
<sup>8</sup> Matthew Nussbaum, “Trump’s Mar-a-Lago getaway could cost taxpayers more than \$3 million,” *Politico* (February 3, 2017) (online at <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/trump-mar-lago-taxpayers-234562>).

<sup>9</sup> George Bennett, “Trump to return to Palm Beach for third straight weekend,” *Palm Beach Post* (February 13, 2017) (online at <http://postonpolitics.blog.palmbeachpost.com/2017/02/13/trump-might-return-to-palm-beach-for-third-straight-weekend/>).

2. Have telephonic, electronic, and any other communications by President Trump and his staff followed appropriate security procedures? Has a secure space for classified or sensitive communications been established at Mar-a-Lago?
3. Do staff, guests, and others who gain access to Mar-a-Lago (including foreign nationals) undergo appropriate security checks and clearance procedures?
4. Are the expenses incurred by the Secret Service and other government entities that travel with the President and stay at Mar-a-Lago fair and appropriate?
5. Has President Trump made any payments to the Treasury resulting from profits at his hotels?

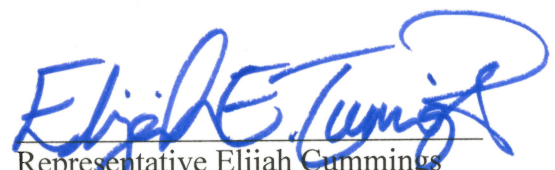
We also ask that you provide any recommendations necessary to ensure that the President and his staff avoid violating national security protocols in the future, and ensure that taxpayer funds are used appropriately when the President travels to his private club.

Sincerely,




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Senator Elizabeth Warren



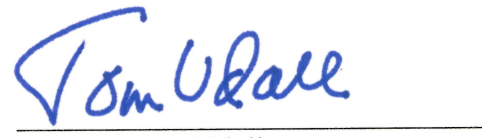
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Representative Elijah Cummings  
Ranking Member, House Committee  
on Oversight and Government  
Reform



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Senator Sheldon Whitehouse



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Senator Tom Udall