



ERIC LEE NYT

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## Republicans fret over Iran war; Pentagon offers few answers

BY ROBERT JIMISON, MEGAN MINEIRO AND ERIC SCHMITT  
NYT News Service

WASHINGTON

Republicans in Congress are growing more anxious about the Trump administration's handling of the war in Iran as their questions about its objectives and cost, including whether ground troops will be needed, go unanswered.

Several GOP lawmakers emerged Wednesday from classified briefings with Pentagon officials on

Capitol Hill complaining that they had not received crucial details about the way forward. Their frustration came nearly a month into a conflict in which Republicans have given President Donald Trump broad latitude to wage war with no congressional input and resisted calling administration officials to provide a public accounting of what they are doing.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., the chair of the Armed Services Committee who attended one of

the briefings Wednesday, said senior officials had failed to provide basic details about the scope and direction of the military campaign.

"We want to know more about what's going on," an uncharacteristically irritated Rogers told reporters. "We're just not getting enough answers."

Across the Capitol, Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., the chair of his chamber's Armed Services panel, suggested he was also frustrated about the lack

of information.

"Let me put it this way," Wicker said of his House counterpart, according to Politico. "I can see why he might have said that."

The complaints came as the Pentagon prepared to deploy nearly 7,000 additional troops to the Middle East, including forces from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Pendleton, California, and the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, moves intended to bolster operations tied to the war

in Iran. They surfaced as lawmakers are also bracing for a potential \$200 billion funding request from the Trump administration to pay for the conflict.

Other Republicans echoed those concerns, pointing to discrepancies between the administration's public rationale and objectives for the war and the information that had been shared privately with them.

Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., said she left the briefing troubled by what she described as shifting explanations for the conflict and unclear military objectives.

"The justifications presented to the American public for the war in Iran were not the same military objectives we were briefed on today in the House Armed Services Committee," Mace said in a social media post. "This gap is deeply troubling. The longer this war continues, the faster it will lose the support of Congress and the American people."

In classified briefings for lawmakers in both chambers Wednesday, Pentagon officials declined to outline when or

how U.S. ground forces might be used in Iran, according to two people familiar with the sessions who spoke about them on the condition of anonymity. During the closed-door session with senators, according to another person familiar with it who requested anonymity to describe it in general terms, Republican Sens. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Jerry Moran of Kansas and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska complained about how limited the information was,

including requests for details on the cost of the military campaign.

Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., said that officials "don't have an official number at this point" for the cost of the operation. Asked about the Pentagon's \$200 billion funding request for the war, he told reporters that the administration was "obviously" working to "figure out how we're going to get it done."

To date, few Republicans have publicly joined Democrats in raising questions about the war, even as Democrats have tried repeatedly to demand testimony from top officials and force votes insisting that Congress authorize the use of force. But with the conflict dragging on, gas prices rising and more U.S. troops heading to the region, some in the GOP have begun sounding alarms.

"We will not sacrifice American lives for the same failed foreign policies," Mace said Wednesday. "The war machine may be willing to give the lives of your sons and daughters for the price of oil, but we are not."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt defended the administration's approach, reiterating that it does not believe formal congressional authorization is required at this stage of the conflict.

She said notifications to Congress and classified briefings had been provided "out of courtesy and out of respect," describing the current situation in the Middle East not as a war but as "major combat operations" against Iran.

## 100 days to 250 years, with 350 million invited

BY MIKE MAGNER  
CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON

With 100 days to go until the nation's 250th birthday, a commission set up by Congress to organize the celebrations reasserted itself after several months in the shadows of a separate White House planning group.

The commission, known as America250, this week unveiled plans for a series of nationwide events intended to bring together 350 million Americans to commemorate the 250 years since the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776 - "350 for 250," as Chair Rosie Rios put it.

"What really inspired this commission were three words that we used as we developed this programming: educate, engage and unite," said Rios, the former U.S. treasurer in the Obama administration who has led the organization for the past four years of its 10-year existence.

Among the plans are programs focused on volunteerism, charitable giving, entrepreneurship, patriotism, culture and, above all, the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution, Rios said.

"This commission has laid out the foundation for what promises to be the largest and most inspiring celebration and commemoration in our nation's history," she said. "No one has ever made the grand declaration that they could engage and inspire 350 million Americans in anything. But we are doing just that."

The announcement of the "semiquincentennial" plans was made at a news conference in the newly renovated White House

Visitor Center, a clear attempt to show that America250 is not in competition with the Trump administration for control of the birthday planning.

"We represent all three branches of government," said Rios, noting that she serves as commission chair at the discretion of the president. "We've made it very clear that these are parallel paths that we are taking, and that we are taking the 'sea to shining sea' approach."

In other words, as Rios said in a December interview with Roll Call, President Donald Trump has the reins for events in Washington, D.C., while the commission's plans, laid out in a 65-page "playbook," take place throughout the country.

There has been some confusion about who was leading the planning since January 2025, when Trump established a task force to lead federal agency efforts to celebrate the 250th birthday, which Rios said she had recommended to the White House staff.

But then Trump followed up in December by creating a public-private partnership called Freedom 250 that he said "connects, aligns, and amplifies national and local efforts to deliver the defining presidential moments of this anniversary year."

Democrats and others have accused Trump of using the nation's birthday to celebrate himself and raise money for his administration.

### FUNDING QUESTIONS

America250 has received nearly \$80 million from Congress since fiscal 2019, including \$15 million in each of the past four years, according to the group's latest annual report, and the Republican budget reconciliation law known as the

"One, Big, Beautiful Bill" allocated \$150 million for the semiquincentennial. Only \$25 million of that reconciliation total has gone to the congressional commission so far, according to published reports.

A dozen Senate Democrats led by Adam B. Schiff of California wrote to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum earlier this month demanding a full accounting of how the reconciliation funds are being spent, and two watchdog groups, Public Citizen and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, have called for investigations.

Kellyanne Conway, a longtime Trump adviser who is on the America250 commission, insisted there is no conflict between the White House plans and the congressional group's efforts.

"This is a great collaboration," Conway said at the America250 news conference. "We have full alignment around a shared goal of making this the biggest and most inspirational moment, or at least one of them in our nation's young but inspiring and very robust history."

Rios did not discuss funding issues at her news conference Tuesday, but did express support for the administration's efforts, including its plans for a "Great American State Fair" on the National Mall this summer and the parade and fireworks on July 4.

She did not mention Trump's plans to hold an Ultimate Fighting Championship at the White House on June 14 and a "Freedom 250 Grand Prix" auto race on the streets of Washington in August, both of which have been criticized as outside the focus of the 250th birthday celebration.



BONNIE CASH UPI

U.S. Attorney for D.C. Jeanine Pirro speaks during a news conference at the Department of Justice Headquarters in February. One of her prosecutors admitted in court this month that the office had no evidence of a crime committed in the renovation of the Federal Reserve building.

## Prosecutor admits no evidence of crime in Fed renovation

BY LISA HORNUNG  
UPI.com

A federal prosecutor told a judge in Washington, D.C., that his office had no evidence of a crime committed by the Federal Reserve earlier this month in its investigation of the renovation of the Fed.

"What evidence is there of fraud or criminal misconduct in relation to the renovations?" Chief U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg asked prosecutor George A. Massucco-LaTaif at a previously sealed hearing on March 3.

"We do not know at this time," Massucco-LaTaif said, according to a now-unsealed transcript of the court proceedings, first reported by The Washington Post. "However, there are 1.2 billion reasons for us to look into it."

When Boasberg pressed on, Massucco-LaTaif admitted "we don't know" which of Powell's statements from his congressional testimony in June were false.

"There are certain areas that he addressed that caused concern," Massucco-LaTaif said.

"\$1.2 billion, that's the GDP of some smaller countries, yet we are going to overlook it as, oh, it's just overrun because it's a historical building? That doesn't seem right," Massucco-LaTaif told Boasberg.

"And are we prohibited from looking into it? That would seem to, you know, put a chilling effect on any investigation the government ever did," he added.

A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office, led by Jeannine Pirro, told The Post that the purpose of a grand jury investigation is to determine if there is probable cause.

"That is exactly what we are doing here as we investigate the discrepancies in Federal Reserve Chair Jerome H. Powell's testimony before Congress and the billion-dollar-plus cost overrun," the spokesperson said.

The Department of Justice began a criminal investigation in January into Powell's testimony

last year about the renovations. Powell said the investigations were "pretexts" to punish him and the Fed after it did not set interest rates where President Donald Trump wanted them.

After the March 3 hearing, Boasberg released an opinion on March 11 in which he quashed two subpoenas.

"The Government has produced essentially zero evidence to suspect Chair Powell of a crime; indeed, its justifications are so thin and unsubstantiated that the Court can only conclude that they are pretextual," Boasberg wrote in the opinion.

"Indeed, most members of the committee that Powell testified before - including a majority of each party's members, as well as the committee's chair - have said that they do not think he committed any crime," the judge wrote.

President Donald Trump told reporters last week during the visit with the Japanese prime minister that the renovation at the Fed could have been accomplished for \$25 million.

"They're spending \$4 billion. All right? So it's, uh - there is criminality," Trump said. "Maybe it's with the contractor."

Prosecutors have said in court that the renovation's cost is estimated at \$2.5 billion.

Pirro has said the Justice Department will appeal the quashed subpoenas, and the U.S. attorney's office filed a request for Boasberg to reconsider his ruling.

Powell's term as chair ends in May, and Trump has appointed Kevin Warsh to replace him. It's unclear if Powell will stay on the board as a governor for the rest of his term.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said he would block Warsh's nomination in the Senate until the investigation of Powell is dropped. His stance could block the nomination from consideration by the Senate.