



Richard A. Grenell
2700 F St NW
Washington, D.C. 20566

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Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Hart Senate Office Building
Room 530
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse,

I am concerned about your careless attacks on me and my team. The letter you signed did not undergo basic fact-checking. It is filled with partisan attacks and false accusations. Your staff relied on anonymous sources, inaccurate gossip, and allegations from partisan reporters who never had access to the data or facts I'm happy to provide below.

As President of the Kennedy Center, I take financial responsibility extremely seriously. When I arrived, we were paying a bloated staff with our future debt reserves account. The individual who had the job before me was getting paid \$1,210,635 per year. There were 94 people employed in the Development Department (today, there are 16). And the deferred maintenance of the building was quite literally making the building fall apart. Today, and for the first time in decades, we have a balanced budget at the Kennedy Center. There was no reference to these facts in your letter.

Here are some additional answers to your questions:

1. Before the arrival of new leadership, The Kennedy Center was hemorrhaging donor dollars. Members of the executive leadership team were paid between \$400,000 to \$700,000 per year. New leadership has ended the financial chaos. If any department wants to create a new position, they must first submit a business plan to the Finance department to enforce financial responsibility and curb unnecessary staff costs.
2. The cost of convening a single board meeting under previous leadership was over \$120,000 in expenses. Today, it's a fraction of that cost, with the next Board meeting being hosted by a Board Member at no cost to us. While you enjoyed those previous exorbitant Board meetings, you have not attended one under the new leadership.

3. We have not cancelled shows. We have installed a break-even policy for programming and rentals writ large. I established a new policy that all events must be revenue neutral. This means that if our ticket-sales modeling did not cover all the costs of the program, then the program or rental could not be confirmed without a generous donor or sponsor to make up the deficit. In all the rental examples you mention, we have had donors or sponsors cover in excess of the total costs.

4. We have always welcomed participation from both parties. We continue to invite both Democrats and Republicans to see the changes we have made – we have yet to have a single Democrat take us up on our invitation.

5. FIFA has given us several million dollars, in addition to paying all of the expenses for this event in lieu of a rental fee. Your focus on simple rental fees is no way to run an institution as diverse as the Kennedy Center. A simple rental fee would not have been enough to cover the magnitude of the event.

6. My former colleague from Embassy Berlin, a US Army bomb squad officer and GWOT veteran, is also an accomplished editor, researcher, and writer. For a period of six months, he researched and helped curate the programming for a historical and educational exhibit related to his expertise that will take place in one of the lounges, made possible by a donor who gave \$10 million to the Kennedy Center for the rights. This donation covered 100% of the costs of his research and writing assistance; The Kennedy Center simply fronted the money to get the project started immediately to ensure we hit our deadline for opening the exhibit. His term of engagement with the Kennedy Center has already ended.

7. Jeff Halperin was brought on board for his incredible multimedia expertise. He is doing the job of two previous employees and is creating content faster than we've ever seen. His expertise saves us tens of thousands of dollars per year.

8. Lisa Dale, a Chilean-American who I gather would not have been welcome at your private beach club, has helped raise \$117,012,000 this year so far. Hiring her was an enormous improvement over the deficit spending the center was engaging in before. She has accomplished this with a staff of 16, compared to the 94 people in that department under the previous leadership. For this, she should be thanked.

9. Each of the food and beverage costs you cite were for donor-based events and meals and represent a fraction of the costs from the previous leadership. In 2024, for example, fundraising expenses totaled \$9.3 million, including \$4 million from April to June alone. I'm aware that you never asked to see expenses under the previous leadership, before I arrived. If you would like to see them, please let me know.

10. It is customary for the Kennedy Center to put up new employees at the Watergate Hotel, next-door to the Kennedy Center, for two weeks while new hires move to Washington, D.C. Watergate Hotel expenses in 2024, for example, totalled \$878,000.

12. The NewsNation event referenced was a bipartisan event featuring host Chris Cuomo, Senator John Fetterman, and Stephen A. Smith. No one would describe this as a giveaway to the President's political allies. This group engaged in bipartisan debate with no restrictions on speech.

I reiterate my invitation to you to come to the Kennedy Center and enjoy our new commonsense programming and responsible financial stewardship.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Grenell