



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Sam Graves
Chairman

Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

Nick Christensen, Staff Director

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

March 13, 2026

Ambassador Richard Grenell
President
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
2700 F St., NW
Washington, DC 20566

Mr. Elliot Berke
General Counsel
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
2700 F St., NW
Washington, DC 20566

Dear Ambassador Grenell and Mr. Berke:

As an Ex Officio Congressionally designated member of the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees, I write to share my appreciation for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) and express my concern about its current direction. I will be in my district attending official duties and, unfortunately, unable to attend the March 16th Board of Trustees meeting.

Any objective observer would agree this has been a tumultuous time for the Kennedy Center. That is unfortunate. I do not celebrate that, and neither should you. This difficult moment for the Center requires your close oversight and leadership. Bipartisan support for the Kennedy Center has spanned decades, and I want that partnership to continue and thrive.

The Kennedy Center would not exist without decades of strong support from Congress. After authorizing the establishment of a National Cultural Center in 1958¹ and renaming it the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1964², Congress authorized funding for operations

¹ <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=72&page=1698>

² <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=78&page=4>

and maintenance, and capital repair and restoration for the Kennedy Center in 1984, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2019 and funding for parking improvements and the plaza construction in 1997 and 2002.

During the 2025 budget reconciliation process, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure provided \$256,657,000³ to repair and restore the facility and eliminate its backlog of maintenance projects, which I championed. This funding was six times the annual funding the Kennedy Center receives through the annual appropriations process.

I expected the funding provided through the reconciliation process to support the Kennedy Center's 2026 budget request which detailed "a major upgrade of the building-wide fire alarm systems, carpet replacement in the plaza level public spaces, replacement of existing air handling units, replacement of seating system in the Concert Hall, and concrete repairs in the garages and loading docks" as well as technical stage system upgrades, elevator modernizations and the undertaking of a new Comprehensive Building Plan (CBP).⁴

President Trump recently announced the two-year closure of the Kennedy Center for "construction, revitalization and complete rebuilding."⁵ As the Ranking Member of the Committee which authorized the construction and renovation funding, I have the following questions and requests related to the closure that I will pursue, including when Administration officials appear before the Committee.

- According to the Kennedy Center's 2026 budget request, the next Comprehensive Building Plan (CBP) is scheduled to be updated in 2026 and implemented in 2027.
 - In the absence of an updated CBP how was the scope of work for this two-year renovation project curated?
 - Is there a current capital plan with a clear list of prioritized projects?
 - What criteria were used to develop the list?
- Please provide all information on any cost-benefit analysis conducted that compared closing the Kennedy Center during repairs versus doing repair work in phases while keeping the facility open.
 - Was this analysis completed prior to President Trump's announcement of a two-year closure?
 - Why is the repair work not being phased in such a way that the facility can remain open?
- Congress provides the Kennedy Center with annual appropriations for repairs, maintenance and construction while the Kennedy Center funds programming, operations and salaries with proceeds from tickets sales and donations.
 - What non-federal financial obligations must the Kennedy Center meet during the two-year shutdown?

³ <https://www.congress.gov/119/plaws/publ21/PLAW-119publ21.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.kennedy-center.org/globalassets/our-story/mission/kennedy-center-fy26-budget-justification-to-congress.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/19/nx-s1-5717475/trump-kennedy-center-renovations>

- How will you meet those obligations in the absence of tickets sales and donations?
- How will you ensure that you do not use federal funding to support operations contradictory to the Congressional mandate?
- To my knowledge, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) has not been consulted on this project. The NCPC has congressionally mandated approval and advisory review responsibilities when building and site improvements are planned for federal buildings and on federal land in the National Capital Region.⁶ No work other than repairs and maintenance should begin without the approval of the NCPC.
 - Will you submit designs to the NCPC for review and approval before you start construction?
- Some projects mentioned by President Trump such as new carpets in areas which had new carpets installed within the past two years, new drapes and marble arm rests are not needed for the continued functioning of the building. They are aesthetic choices.
 - Do you have a process in place for differentiating between capital repair projects that can and should be paid for with federal funding and other projects that should not?
 - How will you ensure that federal funding is used solely for its intended purpose—to fund capital repairs?
- Compliance with federal contracting requirements can slow down any construction project.
 - Do you have sufficient warranted contracting staff in place to support the construction requirements?
 - Will construction products be American-sourced?

I request that you provide my staff with the following: a workplan prior to the onset of construction, quarterly progress reports and tours of the construction upon request.

It is your responsibility to oversee the Kennedy Center, ensure transparency with Congress and spend public money ethically, appropriately and effectively. This is a serious job that demands a commitment to oversight. That is not what Congress and the public are seeing right now.

Expect Congress to exercise its independent oversight of the Kennedy Center and the proposed renovations via Congressional inquiries, letters, hearings, legislation. Your transparency is crucial to the ethical, legal and appropriate operations of the Kennedy Center.

It is my hope that you leave the Kennedy Center, which belongs to the nation and is a memorial to President Kennedy, better than you found it.

⁶ https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/Submission_Guidelines_Overview.pdf

I would appreciate your sharing this letter with the Board of Trustees prior to the upcoming board meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rick Larsen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Representative Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

cc: Kennedy Center Board of Trustees