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Trump administration plans crackdown on protests outside White House

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The administration has suggested it could charge ‘event management’ costs for protests and close 80% of the sidewalks

Donald Trump has frequently and falsely crowed [about the idea of so-called paid protesters](#), including most recently the sexual assault survivors who confronted senators in the lead up to the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation. Now his administration may be trying to turn that concept on its head, by requiring citizens to pay to be able to protest, among other affronts to the first amendment.

Under the proposal [introduced by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke](#) in August, the administration is looking to close 80% of the sidewalks surrounding the White House, and has suggested that it could charge “event management” costs, for demonstrations.

Currently the National Park Service is able to recoup costs for special events, but not spontaneous protests like the ones that typically take place in Lafayette Park across from the White House. These charges could include the cost of erecting barriers, cleaning fees, repairs to grass, permit fees and the salaries of official personnel on hand to monitor such demonstrations, all tallied at the discretion of the police.

Naturally, civil liberties groups consider the proposals an affront to the rights guaranteed under the first amendment. As [the ACLU notes](#), such fees “could make mass protests like Martin Luther King Jr’s historic 1963 March on Washington and its ‘I have a dream’ speech too

expensive to happen”.

During the Vietnam War the federal government attempted to impose similar barriers to citizens freely assembling in protest and were sued by the ACLU. In their ruling the courts [reasserted the fact that](#) “the use of parks for public assembly and airing of opinions is historic in our democratic society, and one of its cardinal values”.

The White House sidewalk, Lafayette Park, and the Ellipse were unique sites for the exercise of those rights, they ruled, and therefore they could not “accord deference to an executive approach to use of the White House sidewalk that is rooted in a bias against expressive conduct...”

[@PositivelyBrie](#) "If you have to pay for free speech it's not free" The [@NatlParkService](#) is considering fees for demonstrations in D.C.. [@ThePCJF](#) is against the proposed plan, calling it an attack on free speech. WATCH: [@WNCN](#) [@WFXRnews](#) Public comment on proposal ---><https://bit.ly/2PywDUA>

The National Park Service has attempted to justify the proposal by pointing out that large protests, like the Women’s March, overtax their abilities, and place a heavy cost on the government. One might argue when it comes to preserving our right to protest no cost is too high.

The public has until 15 October to comment on the plans.

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