

Yes, Trump can accept an airplane as a gift, but he shouldn't

There is nothing legally wrong with President Donald Trump's accepting a Boeing 747-8 from Qatar for use as a temporary new Air Force One. But he would be unwise to do so.

Ask yourself a question: If the plane were a gift from Australia rather than Qatar, would it elicit the same objections being raised today?

Of course not. Legally, the U.S. government is in the clear to accept the donation of an aircraft from a foreign government. The precedent was set by Congress in the 1990s, when it authorized the president to accept from any person, foreign government or international organization financial and in-kind contributions related to operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The United States took in more than \$50 billion from Germany, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and other countries. Current law authorizes the defense secretary to "accept from any person, foreign government, or international organization any contribution of money or real or personal property ... for use by the Department of Defense."

News reports indicate that Trump would then donate the plane to his presidential library at the end of his term. There is precedent for this as well. In 2001, President George W. Bush approved the transfer of the Air Force One plane that Ronald Reagan used during his presidency from the Defense Department to the Reagan library in Simi Valley, California. It is on permanent loan from the U.S. Air Force, and is now the centerpiece of the library.

Similarly, the Richard Nixon Presidential Library currently houses the Marine One helicopter that Nixon flew in during his administration, including on his iconic farewell from the White House South Lawn after resigning the presidency. (The Defense Department donated it to the National Museum of the Marine Corps, which in turn has loaned it to the Nixon library). Once the current Air Force One aircraft are decommissioned, expect fierce lobbying by other presidential libraries for those planes.

One obvious difference:



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Previous presidential aircraft were donated for historical display purposes. Trump reportedly plans to use the donated plane during his post-presidency. That is unprecedented, but not unlawful - and ultimately, I think, not a big deal. Trump will be almost 83 years old when he leaves office. He might very well give Jimmy Carter (who died at 100) a run for the title of oldest living former president. But, even if he does, after a brief period of use it will eventually become, in all likelihood, a museum exhibit like the Air Force One at Simi Valley.

The scandal here is not Trump's willingness to accept the gift of a plane, but Boeing's utter failure to deliver the planes it promised Trump in his first term. Boeing was supposed to deliver two new presidential aircraft by 2024. But Boeing now says it might not be able to deliver them until 2029 or later - after Trump has left office. ("Another mess I inherited from Biden," Trump said this week.) It is pathetic that America's largest aircraft maker cannot deliver a new plane for the president of the United States - and understandable that Trump is looking at other options to replace the two current 35-year-old planes serving as Air Force One.

The problem is not the law; it is the donor. It would be one thing if Trump were accepting the gift from Australia or even Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. But Qatar is the nexus of terrorism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East. Qatar has funneled over \$1 billion to Hamas, and was the haven from which Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh directed the terrorist group that carried out the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks from a plush home in Doha, where he kept his billions in ill-gotten wealth. Qatar is also the home to the exiled al-Qaeda-loving emirs of the Taliban, along with countless other terrorists - many of whom travel the

world on Qatari passports.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed ties with Qatar over its sponsorship of terrorism. Qatar also funds media platforms, such as Al Jazeera, spreading anti-semitic, anti-Israel, anti-American, pro-terrorist hate. One Al Jazeera reporter, Ismail Abu Omar, was identified by the Israel Defense Forces as a deputy company commander in Hamas's East Khan Younis Battalion, and reportedly entered Israel with Hamas on Oct. 7, where he filmed Hamas atrocities.

Moreover, the gift comes at a time when Qatar is actively seeking to buy influence in the United States, reportedly spending almost \$100 billion to influence Congress, the executive branch, newsrooms, think tanks and the business community. Qatar is the No. 1 source of foreign funding for American universities, undoubtedly helping to drive the dramatic rise of antisemitism on college campuses

Qatar plays both sides, hosting a U.S. air base (which, incidentally, was built with \$1 billion in Qatari government money) while simultaneously harboring terrorists and promoting Islamist radicalism. The United States should be pressuring Qatar to cease its malign activities, not creating the impression that we are in Qatar's debt by accepting a gift like a \$400 million aircraft for the president's personal use.

Trump's response to these concerns is simple: When someone offers America a luxury airliner at no charge, we should take it. "I could be a stupid person and say, 'Oh no, we don't want a free plane,'" Trump recently said. Why spend half a billion U.S. taxpayer dollars, he asks, if a foreign government is willing to foot the bill?

If the donor were just about any country other than Qatar, I'd agree. Legally, Trump can accept the plane, but just because something is legal does not make it wise. If he wants to buy the plane from Qatar, that's one thing. But he should not accept it as a gift.

Marc Thiessen is a national columnist whose work is published regularly in the Grand Forks Herald.

It's not a cap on growth

MINOT

To address North Dakota's nagging property tax problems, Gov. Kelly Armstrong proposed, and state lawmakers approved, two major policy initiatives.

The first is appropriating some \$408 million in earnings from the Legacy Fund to primary residence tax credits of up to \$1,600. At that amount, thousands and thousands of homeowners won't have any property tax bill at all. The rest will see a significant reduction in what they pay. The true cost of this is likely a bit more — Senate Majority Leader David Hogue said on a recent episode of Plain Talk that his estimate is more like \$440 million, and I suspect he's right — but the relief will be immediate and profound.

The second is a 3% cap on growth in property tax bills.

That last will prove the most controversial part of this policy initiative going forward. The local governments are already chaffing over the cap, and will no doubt blame it for budget headaches going forward.

As this happens, keep in mind two things.

First, local profligacy has made this cap necessary. In past sessions, lawmakers appropriated billions to local governments in vain attempts to buy down property taxes. It didn't work because local elected officials grew spending faster than lawmakers could buy it down. The net result is that property owners, if they were lucky, saw no relief at all. Worst case, they saw their property tax bills continue to rise even as billions of their tax dollars were spent on lowering them.

Local elected officials have proven they cannot be trusted to spend prudently, so the state has had to impose a cap.

Second, there's no reason why significant growth can't happen with this cap in place.

In some of our state's largest and fastest-growing communities, what's driven the property tax problem is



ROB PORT

sprawl. You'd think that a growing community could pay for that growth with a growing tax base, but that hasn't happened because of the way that growth has happened.

Local governments — mostly counties, cities, and school districts — have been driving up property taxes by allowing sprawl. Low-density development on the fringes of their jurisdictions expands their geographic footprint.

Every new school, neighborhood, or commercial development built on the fringes of a community, away from existing infrastructure, means more lane miles for snowplows to cover and more roads for garbage trucks to traverse. Water, sewer, police patrols, and fire protection must serve thousands of additional acres.

The cost of this development is so great that the property taxes paid in the growth zones (when these new projects aren't enjoying some sort of tax abatement in the name of economic growth) can't support it. The cost spills over to existing property, and property tax bills go up.

With the new 3% caps, this irresponsible growth is less likely.

Detractors of the policy will call this a cap on growth, but it's not. It's a cap on sprawl. Communities can still grow, but they must be more responsible about it. Development will have to be denser and more targeted to areas covered by existing infrastructure. Local governments must also be more prudent in approving tax holidays for new developments.

This isn't a cap on growth. It's a mandate for a better sort of local leadership.

Rob Port is a columnist, news reporter and podcast host for Forum News Service. Reach him at rport@forumcomm.com.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

During session, mail-in voting takes a direct hit

BY BARBARA HEADRICK
 Fargo

To the editor,
The League of Women Voters of North Dakota tracks election bills during each legislative session, and, as usual, we saw both good and bad bills introduced by lawmakers. Here's a recap:

A highlight from the session was the passage of HB 1178 to bolster student voting. A recent graduate of Beulah High School, Zofia Dostal, worked with Rep. Anna Novak from District 33 to craft a bill requiring school districts to excuse students from school to cast a ballot. We applaud Zofia for working to pass a law to meet the needs of student voters.

Each session, bills are filed that are bad for North Dakota voters. We saw a bill to make voter data less private (failed),

two bills aimed at banning Fargo's use of approval voting for city elections (both passed), and two resolutions asking North Dakotans to diminish their constitutional right to amend our state constitution (both will be on the ballot in 2026).

The most disappointing election bill to pass was HB 1165. It was a straightforward election law cleanup bill until it was referred back to committee to add a policy change: shortening the timeframe to submit mail-in ballots. This major policy change did not receive a public hearing. It was a last-minute amendment that will impact North Dakota voters who mail their ballot, especially rural voters, Native voters, seniors, and voters with disabilities.

Our takeaway from the session: lawmakers need to stop creating barriers for North Dakota voters to cast a ballot.

Headrick is president of the League of Women Voters of North Dakota.

Contact your lawmakers

Following is telephone and regular mail contact information for North Dakota and Minnesota congressional delegates, as well as for the governors of those states. Email addresses for the delegates can be found on their websites.

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Legislature

North Dakota: During a session, lawmakers can be reached by leaving a message with the legislative phone center at 1-888-635-3447 or 701-328-3373.

Minnesota: During a session, lawmakers in the House of Representatives can be reached by leaving messages at 651-296-2146. Senators can be reached by leaving a message at 651-296-0504.

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— First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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