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The People's Hour

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HOST Mark Ford

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SOURCES Fraudsters steal up to \$300 billion from IRS each year, US Army Reserve asks whether units can be ready in as little as 3 months for Cuba action: report, Pro-Trump TV ads funded by US government continue airing with expanded cost and reach

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Auto-built by news_picker. Source headlines:

- [Washington Times] Fraudsters steal up to \$300 billion from IRS each year

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/sep/25/fraudsters-steal-300-billion-irs-year/>

Why: A \$300 billion annual bleed from the tax system is money straight out of every honest taxpayer's pocket — pure government-waste red meat for an audience that already feels the IRS only comes down hard on the little guy.

- [New York Post] US Army Reserve asks whether units can be ready in as little as 3 months for Cuba action: report

<https://nypost.com/2026/09/25/us-news/us-army-reserve-asks-whether-units-can-be-ready-in-as-little-as-3-months-for-cuba-action-report/>

Why: Any talk of mobilizing reserve units for a new hot spot lands directly with military families and veterans in the audience who bear the cost of deployment decisions made in Washington.

- [AP] Pro-Trump TV ads funded by US government continue airing with expanded cost and reach

<https://apnews.com/article/paid-for-us-government-ad-trump-political-60c020f7ecb7a071c4c604f659388949>

Why: Taxpayer dollars bankrolling political messaging is exactly the kind of bipartisan-swamp behavior this anti-elite audience wants called out, regardless of which party benefits.

01 — OPENER JINGLE

[STING — markford_open.mp3]

02 — COLD OPEN (DATE SLATE + ROADMAP)

Good evening, America. Tonight is Friday, September the twenty-fifth, two thousand twenty-six, This is Mark Ford coming to you live and I want you to picture something with me before we get into the details.

On one side of the screen, the Pentagon is quietly asking commanders if they can be combat ready for Cuba in ninety days. On the other side of that same screen, your tax dollars are paying for television commercials telling you to love the president. And underneath both of those pictures, scammers are walking off with three hundred billion dollars of your IRS money every single year, and nobody in Washington seems to be losing much sleep over it. That is the split screen tonight. War planning on one side, propaganda on the other, and a robbery in progress underneath the whole thing. Let's get into it.

First up, we're calling it Ninety Days to Havana. There's a leaked Army Reserve memo out there, and it's not asking about a training exercise. It's asking commanders whether military police, medics, engineer battalions, and a forward surgical unit could be ready to go in ninety to one hundred and twenty days. Multiple officials, speaking anonymously because they're not allowed to speak at all, have confirmed the Cuba connection. And when reporters asked SOUTHCOM to deny it, they didn't deny it. I'm going to walk you through exactly what kind of units these are, and why that specific combination of logistics, medical, and combat engineering support is not what you send for a training drill. That's the kind of mix you send when you think there's going to be a fight and wounded men to carry off a beach.

Second, we're calling it The Donroe Doctrine. The president has used his own words. He's talked about taking Cuba. He stood up at the United Nations and predicted the Havana government will fall. A whole Caribbean delegation walked out of the room while he said it. Since then, we've gotten new

sanctions on Cuba's nickel industry and on hotel operators tied to the Cuban military, and Diaz-Canel has vowed to fight back. I'm going to dig into what a president actually means when he says he could take another country, and whether the American people have been given a straight answer about any of it.

Third, Paid For By You, Starring Him. There is a government funded ad campaign promoting the president that jumped from fourteen thousand dollars to four hundred and thirty thousand dollars in three days. Three days. There's a Mount Rushmore ad running on Newsmax right now, paid for with your money. The backlash is bipartisan. A Republican senator compared it to Viktor Orban. There is a federal law against using taxpayer money for what amounts to propaganda, and the White House is calling this "educational and unapologetically patriotic." I want to know who signed that check, and why nobody at the agency involved will put their name on it.

And finally, The Three Hundred Billion Dollar Heist. Fraudsters are stealing as much as three hundred billion dollars a year from the IRS. Read that number again. That is more than the ad spending, more than a lot of military budgets combined. I'm going to tie this straight back to the first two stories, because a government that can find money for a self promoting commercial, and can quietly plan a military operation overseas, cannot seem to plug a fraud hole the size of a small country's entire economy. Ask yourself why that is.

Stay with us. This is The People's Hour, on The Mark Ford Show, right here on WRZF. We'll be right back.

03 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

04 — SEGMENT A: NINETY DAYS TO HAVANA

Let's talk about a memo. Not a speech, not a tweet, not a leak from some anonymous op-ed writer with an axe to grind. A memo. The kind of dry, boring, bureaucratic paperwork that never makes the news because nobody wants to read it. Except this one did make the news, because of what it asked.

CBS News got hold of an internal Army message sent out to Army Reserve commanders. And the message asked a simple question. Can your units be ready in ninety to one hundred and twenty days. Not can you run a drill. Not can you show up for annual training. Can you be ready. Ready for what, the memo does not say. It does not mention Cuba by name. It does not say how many troops. It does not say where they would go. But multiple US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, told CBS News exactly what this is about. Cuba.

Now here is where I want you to slow down with me, because the details matter more than the headline. The memo did not ask about combat units. It did not ask if the infantry was ready to storm a beach. It asked about three specific kinds of units. Military police. Medics. And engineers. Plus something called a forward surgical detachment, which is a small mobile team that does trauma care close to a battlefield, the kind of unit you send in when you expect people to get hurt fast and need to patch them up before they can be moved somewhere safer.

Let me walk through each piece, because each piece tells you something.

First, a support battalion. This is logistics. Transportation, maintenance, fuel, supply. This is the stuff nobody thinks about when they picture the military, but it is the stuff that makes everything else possible. You cannot move an army without people who move the fuel and the trucks and the spare parts. If you are planning a training exercise, you use existing supply lines. If you are planning something that requires new supply lines into a foreign country, you need a support battalion.

Second, an engineer battalion. Engineers build things. Roads, bridges, landing strips, forward bases. You do not send engineers somewhere you already control. You send engineers somewhere you expect to be operating for a while, in a place that does not already have the infrastructure you need.

Third, military police. MPs. What do MPs do. They handle detainees. They handle crowd control. They handle security in occupied or contested areas. You do not need military police for a training exercise on a base in Georgia. You need military police when you expect to be controlling territory, controlling people, and you expect some of those people are not going to be happy about it.

And fourth, the medical brigade and that forward surgical detachment. Trauma care. Close to the front. That is not a peacetime deployment. That is a deployment where the planners expect casualties.

You put those four things together, logistics, engineering, military police, and forward trauma care, and what you get is not a training rotation. What you get is the skeleton of an occupation plan. Not a war plan exactly. Not necessarily an invasion in the traditional sense. But a plan for what happens after something happens. A plan for holding ground, controlling people, and treating the wounded.

And the timeline. Ninety to one hundred and twenty days. That is not a random number. Commanders were asked for feedback by this past Friday, and the units in question were described as possibly needed by late December. Do the math. That puts you right in the window that would follow the ninety-day mark. This is not a five-year plan. This is not a maybe-someday contingency buried in a drawer at the Pentagon. This is a live planning question with a deadline attached.

Now, when CBS News asked the Pentagon about this, they went to Southern Command, SOUTHCOM, the combatant command responsible for Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, which of course includes Cuba. And SOUTHCOM gave what I call a non-denial denial. Listen to what they actually said. Quote. Due to operational security concerns, we do not disclose details or comment on US operational movements or potential

deployment timelines associated with current or future operations, contingencies, or planning. End quote. And then they added this. Quote. However, US Southern Command continuously coordinates with the Joint Force to assess a range of potential requirements across its area of responsibility in support of assigned missions. End quote.

Read that again. They did not say this has nothing to do with Cuba. They did not say there is no plan. They said we do not comment on operational movements, and then in the very next breath admitted they are continuously assessing potential requirements. That is not a denial. That is a confirmation dressed up in the driest language the Pentagon could find. If this were nothing, the easiest thing in the world would have been to say it is nothing. They did not say that.

Now let's put this in context, because this memo did not fall out of the sky. This is part of a pattern that has been building for months. President Trump has been talking about Cuba since the early part of this year. Back in March, during the early days of the war with Iran, the president told reporters in the Oval Office that he would have, quote, the honor of taking Cuba, end quote. And when a reporter pushed him on what that meant, he did not walk it back. He leaned into it. Quote. Taking Cuba in some form, yeah. Taking Cuba. I mean, whether I free it, take it, I think I could do anything I want with it, if you want to know the truth. End quote.

That is the President of the United States, on the record, saying he could do anything he wants with Cuba.

Then fast forward to this week. At the United Nations General Assembly, the president told delegates his administration wants, quote, fundamental change, end quote, on the island. He predicted the current government in Havana, quote, will fall, end quote, and that, quote, freedom will be coming to Cuba, end quote. And when he said that, the Caribbean delegation got up and walked out of the hall. That is not a small thing. That is a diplomatic incident at the largest gathering of world leaders on the planet.

And it did not stop at speeches. Ahead of that UN session, the Trump administration slapped heavy new sanctions on Cuban entities and officials,

including research and development enterprises tied to the country's nickel industry. Nickel is one of the few things Cuba actually has to sell to the world. Squeeze that, and you squeeze the last bit of hard currency the regime has left.

Meanwhile, on the ground in Cuba, things are falling apart. There is a fuel blockade that has crippled the country. The Cuban Prime Minister, Manuel Marrero, recently rolled out something like two hundred free-market reforms trying to rescue the economy. A Spanish hotel company, Iberostar, has pulled out of managing about a dozen hotels it used to run in partnership with Gaesa, the military-linked conglomerate that runs much of the Cuban economy and is under US sanctions. Businesses are fleeing. The money is drying up.

And Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel is not staying quiet either. He has vowed to counter any US attack, and he has accused Washington of, quote, aggression, end quote, and, quote, economic warfare, end quote, over the blockade on oil imports.

So here is the picture. You have a president who said in March he wants to take Cuba. You have that same president in September telling the UN the government will fall. You have new sanctions targeting the last profitable industry on the island. You have an economy in freefall and a hotel company for hire pulling out. You have a Cuban president promising to fight back. And now you have an Army Reserve memo asking commanders whether military police, engineers, logistics units, and trauma surgeons can be ready in ninety to one hundred and twenty days. And you have SOUTHCOM refusing to say it is not about Cuba.

All of this fits under something officials are calling the Donroe Doctrine, a play on the old Monroe Doctrine, the idea that the United States gets to call the shots in this hemisphere and nobody else gets a vote. That is not a new idea in American history. But applying it to Cuba, with actual troop planning, in the fall of two thousand twenty-six, that is new.

Now I am not going to sit here and tell you a Marine is landing on a beach in Havana in December. Nobody knows that, and the Pentagon sure is not

saying. But I have read enough government memos in my life to know what it means when the questions being asked are about medics and engineers and military police instead of infantry and artillery. It means somebody up the chain is not planning a war. They are planning what comes after one. And when the planning gets that specific, with a specific window, ninety to one hundred and twenty days, and specific unit types that only make sense if you are going to hold ground and treat casualties, you are well past the theoretical.

The regular guy watching this at home does not get a vote on any of it. He will find out what happened after it happens, the same way we all just found out about a memo that was never supposed to leak in the first place.

We'll be right back.

05 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

06 — SEGMENT B: THE DONROE DOCTRINE

Let's talk about Cuba. Because something is happening ninety miles off the coast of Florida, and nobody in Washington wants to give you a straight answer about what it is.

Start with the Army Reserve. CBS News got hold of an internal Army message this week. In that message, Army Reserve commanders were asked whether military police units, medics, and other support units could be ready as soon as late December. The message says these units are "possibly needed in ninety to one hundred and twenty days." Commanders had until this past Friday to respond.

Now, the message itself does not say the word Cuba. It does not say how many troops. It does not say where they would go. But CBS talked to multiple U.S. officials, speaking anonymously, who said the Communist island is

exactly what this planning is about. And the units in question are not exactly what you'd send to fight a peer military. A support battalion that handles logistics. Transportation, fuel, supply. An engineer battalion. A medical brigade, including a forward surgical detachment for trauma care. That is what you build when you are planning to put boots on the ground somewhere and you expect people to get hurt.

I asked myself, is this normal contingency planning that the Pentagon does for a hundred countries at once? Could be. U.S. Southern Command, which covers Central and South America and the Caribbean, gave CBS a very careful non-answer. Here is the quote. "Due to operational security concerns, we do not disclose details or comment on U.S. operational movements or potential deployment timelines associated with current or future operations, contingencies, or planning." End quote. Then they added that Southern Command "continuously coordinates with the Joint Force to assess a range of potential requirements" in the region. That is a real quote, from a real spokesperson, and it tells you nothing. Which, in my experience, usually means there is something to tell.

Here's why I don't think this is routine. Because the president of the United States has been saying the quiet part out loud for months.

Go back to March of this year. Iran war is just getting started. Trump is in the Oval Office talking to reporters. And he says he would have, quote, "the honor of taking Cuba." End quote. A reporter presses him. He doubles down. Quote. "Taking Cuba in some form, yeah. Taking Cuba. I mean, whether I free it, take it, I think I could do anything I want with it, if you want to know the truth." End quote.

Sit with that for a second. The president of the United States said, about a sovereign nation, that he could do "anything I want with it." Not liberate it. Not sanction it. Do anything he wants with it. That is not diplomatic language. That is the language of a man who believes ownership of a country is a live option on the table.

Now fast forward to this week. The United Nations General Assembly, eighty-first session, New York City. Trump gets up in front of the delegates

and tells them his administration wants, quote, "fundamental change" end quote, on the island. Then he goes further. He predicts the current government in Havana "will fall." He says "freedom will be coming to Cuba." And when he said that, the Caribbean delegation got up and walked out of the hall. Not one country. A bloc of them. Walked out on the President of the United States at the UN.

Think about what it takes to get a whole regional bloc to walk out of the General Assembly. These are small nations. They depend on relationships with everybody, including Washington. For them to stand up and leave the room while the American president is speaking tells you they heard something they consider a direct threat, not a policy statement.

And this didn't come out of nowhere. Right before the UN gathering, the Trump administration rolled out heavy new sanctions on Cuban entities and officials. Not just the usual names. This time it hit military research and development enterprises tied to the country's nickel industry. Cuba sits on some of the largest nickel reserves in the world. Nickel is a real export earner for a government that is already flat broke. You go after the nickel sector, you are not making a symbolic gesture. You are trying to choke off one of the last hard-currency lifelines the regime has left.

At the same time, on the ground in Havana, the Spanish hotel company Iberostar has pulled out of managing about a dozen hotels it used to run in partnership with Gaesa. Gaesa is the military-linked conglomerate that runs a huge chunk of the Cuban economy, and it's already under U.S. sanctions. So a European hotel operator is walking away from Cuban tourism because doing business with the Cuban military has gotten too radioactive under American sanctions law. That is the squeeze working exactly the way it's designed to work. Tourism dries up. Nickel exports get harder to sell. Fuel imports get blocked. And all of that lands on regular Cubans standing in line for bread, not on the generals running Gaesa from an office in Havana.

The Cuban government sees exactly what's happening. President Miguel Diaz-Canel came out and vowed to counter any U.S. attack. He accused Washington of "aggression" and "economic warfare," specifically over the blocking of oil imports to the island. His prime minister, Manuel Marrero,

actually rolled out close to two hundred free-market reforms earlier this year trying to keep the economy from collapsing under the fuel blockade. Two hundred reforms. That tells you how much trouble the island is actually in. This is not a government that thinks it's winning. This is a government that thinks it's fighting for its life, and it is telling its own people that the enemy at the gate is the United States.

Now here's the phrase you need to know. Officials inside this administration have a name for what they're doing across the whole Western Hemisphere. They call it the Donroe Doctrine. You hear that and you know exactly what they're going for. The old Monroe Doctrine, from eighteen twenty-three, said Europe stays out of the Americas, this hemisphere belongs to us. The Donroe Doctrine is the twenty twenty-six remix. Sanctions, military planning, a president openly musing about taking territory, all wrapped in the language of hemispheric dominance with the president's own name stitched onto it.

So ask yourself what a president actually means when he says he could "take" another country. Does he mean regime change through economic pressure, the kind that's been tried against Cuba for sixty years already with a full trade embargo? Does he mean covert support for an uprising? Or does he mean something with soldiers in it, engineer battalions and trauma surgeons and a ninety to one hundred twenty day timeline that lands right around late December or January?

Because those are three very different things, and Americans have gotten zero clarity on which one this is. The Army Reserve message doesn't say. Southern Command won't say. The president himself, when asked directly back in March, gave an answer that could mean invasion, could mean liberation, could mean nothing at all, since by his own words he wasn't sure himself, whether he'd "free it" or "take it." He used both words in the same breath like they were interchangeable. They are not interchangeable. One of them means an amphibious force landing on a beach with combat medics behind it.

I want to be fair here. There is a case for pressure on Havana. The Cuban government is authoritarian, it has jailed dissidents, and it has run its own

economy into the ground for decades through mismanagement, not just the embargo. Nobody serious argues the Diaz-Canel government is some kind of paradise being unfairly picked on. That's real.

But there's a difference between squeezing a regime with sanctions and quietly staffing up combat medical units for a deadline in the dead of winter. If this administration believes military action against Cuba serves American interests, the honest thing to do is come to Congress and to the American people and make that case out loud. Say it plainly. Instead what we get is a leaked internal memo, a spokesperson trained to say nothing, and a president who told us back in March, in his own words, that he thinks he can do "anything I want" with another country, and nobody in the White House press room seems interested in following up on that sentence since.

That's the pattern with this administration on foreign policy. Big declarations at the podium. UN speeches predicting governments will fall. Then total silence on the actual mechanics, the actual troop numbers, the actual plan, until reporters drag pieces of it out of leaked internal Army messages. If you are the parent of a young man or woman in the Army Reserve who might get a call this winter, you deserve better than "possibly needed in ninety to one hundred twenty days" and a "no comment" from Southern Command. You deserve to know, before the boots are on a plane, whether your country is about to go to war over a nickel embargo and a president's old grudge.

We'll be right back.

07 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

08 — SEGMENT C: PAID FOR BY YOU, STARRING HIM

Let me tell you a story about a television commercial. Just a thirty-second spot. You've probably seen it if you've had the TV on this week. And I want you to sit with the numbers on this one, because the numbers are the whole story.

Three days ago, that ad cost fourteen thousand dollars to run. That's a real number. Fourteen thousand dollars. That's what it cost to put it on the air the first day. By Friday, the same ad, the same thirty seconds, cost four hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Four hundred and thirty thousand. In three days. That's not a media buy. That's a rocket launch.

And here's the part that should stop you cold. It's not a campaign ad. It's not paid for by a candidate, a party, or a super PAC. It's paid for by the United States government. Your money. My money. Everybody listening to this show's money.

The ad features President Trump talking about defeating communism, with text on the screen bragging about the "largest tax cuts in history," "reigniting American manufacturing," and a line about defending "law and order and police." It's got a soundtrack. A chorus. Singing "love me." Over and over. "Love me." And at the very end, it discloses, quietly, that it was paid for by the United States government.

Now I want you to think about that phrase for a second. A chorus singing "love me" while the President of the United States talks about defeating communism, funded by the taxpayer, ending with a government disclosure line. If somebody described that to you without telling you it was real, you'd think it was a parody. It's not a parody. It ran for a third straight day this week on network television in markets across the country, according to AdImpact, the firm that tracks this kind of media spending. And AdImpact says the real number could be even higher than four hundred and thirty thousand, because it depends on whether individual networks classified it as a political ad or not.

That's not the only one. A second ad started airing this week too, paid for by the government, this one running on Newsmax, specifically during two programs, Carl Higbie Frontline and Greg Kelly Reports. This one's a full minute long. It's got scenic nighttime footage of Mount Rushmore, and it uses clips from the President's Fourth of July weekend speech there, the one honoring the country's two hundred and fiftieth anniversary. In it, the President says, quote, "We know that this is not an ending. This is only the beginning of the golden age of America." End quote. Nobody's said yet how much that one cost. It just started running.

So here's where I stop and ask the question nobody in Washington wants to answer. Who cut this check? What agency? What line item? What department of the United States government looked at a budget, looked at a commercial with President Trump talking about communism and a chorus singing "love me," and said, yes, that's a good use of taxpayer money, approve it?

Nobody will say. The White House was asked directly which part of the government supplied the funds. They didn't answer the question. They didn't dodge it politely, they just didn't answer it. What they gave instead was a statement calling the ads, quote, "educational and unapologetically patriotic." End quote. And they said, quote, "These public service announcements are about reminding Americans to love their country and understand what makes it worth defending, at home, at our borders, and abroad." End quote.

Public service announcement. That's the phrase they're using. A public service announcement is supposed to tell you to buckle your seatbelt. Get your kids vaccinated. Don't drink and drive. It is not supposed to be the President of the United States bragging about his own tax cuts with a chorus singing "love me" in the background, right in the middle of a midterm election year.

Now here's where it gets serious, and I mean legally serious, not just politically ugly. There is a federal law. It has been on the books for a long time. It prohibits the use of taxpayer money for what the statute calls "publicity or propaganda." It also limits how government employees can engage in partisan political activity on the public dime. That law exists

because the people who wrote it understood something simple. If the party in power can use the treasury to buy itself television commercials, there is no such thing as a fair election ever again. The incumbent always has infinite money, because the incumbent controls the government, and the government's money is the taxpayer's money, and the taxpayer doesn't get a vote on whether his own money gets spent promoting the man currently sitting in the office.

That's not a Republican argument or a Democrat argument. That's just arithmetic. And it's why this thing has drawn criticism from both sides, which almost never happens anymore.

Several House Democrats with senior committee roles came out and demanded the first ad be pulled off the air entirely. Their words, not mine: they called it, quote, "the sort of government propaganda one might expect in North Korea." End quote. Strong language. But here's the part that should really get your attention. It wasn't just Democrats.

Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina, a Republican, called the ad "inappropriate." Tillis isn't running for reelection, so he's got nothing to gain politically by saying that. He's not trying to primary anybody or win anybody's favor. He just looked at it and said it's wrong. And then he went further. He compared it to something he'd expect from Viktor Orban, the former right-wing prime minister of Hungary. Think about what it means for a sitting United States Senator, from the President's own party, to reach for a foreign strongman as the comparison point for a domestic government ad campaign. That's not a small thing to say out loud. That's a Republican senator telling you, on the record, that his own party's administration is running state television the way an authoritarian government runs state television.

And meanwhile, over on the other side of the aisle, Republicans running to defend their majorities in Congress this November have started making their own ads with almost identical messaging. Communism. The economy. Crime. Same themes, same talking points, echoing straight out of a government-funded commercial. So now you've got taxpayer money essentially seeding the talking points for an entire party's midterm campaign strategy, whether that was the intent or not.

I want to go back to that number one more time, because I don't think people have really let it sink in. Fourteen thousand dollars to four hundred and thirty thousand dollars. In three days. That is not how advertising works when somebody is being careful with money. That is not how advertising works when somebody expects to be questioned about where the money came from. That's how spending works when somebody believes nobody is going to stop them, and even if they get caught, nothing is going to happen.

And so far, nothing has happened. The ad kept running. It expanded. It ran for a third straight day even after the backlash, even after a United States Senator from the President's own party called it inappropriate, even after House Democrats demanded it be pulled. It didn't get pulled. It got bigger. More markets, more networks, more spending.

That tells you something important about how this administration is thinking. Criticism isn't a stop sign anymore. It's noise to run through. You say something's wrong, they say it's "educational and unapologetically patriotic," and the ad buy gets bigger the next day. That's the pattern. Not defend and retreat. Defend and expand.

Here's my question, and it's a simple one. If this is truly educational, truly just a public service announcement reminding Americans to love their country, why won't the White House say which agency paid for it? Public service announcements from the government usually tell you right up front who's behind them. The Ad Council. The CDC. The Department of Transportation. You know exactly who's asking you to buckle up. But here, when a reporter simply asks which part of the government supplied the funds, there's silence. No answer. That silence is the whole story. If there were a legitimate line item, a legitimate budget, a legitimate justification, somebody would say it proudly. The fact that nobody will say it tells you they know exactly what this looks like, and they know exactly what the law says about it, and they're hoping the question goes away before somebody in a courtroom asks it under oath.

Because that's really where this is headed. This isn't just a talking point for cable news. There's an actual federal statute here, the ban on taxpayer-funded publicity and propaganda, and there are people in Congress right

now, in both parties, who have the standing to ask the Government Accountability Office to investigate exactly which agency's budget this came out of. That process exists. It's been used before, against administrations of both parties, when government money got used to make officials look good on the taxpayer's dime.

So here's where I land on this. It doesn't matter to me whether you like President Trump or you can't stand him. That's not the question tonight. The question is whether the government of the United States gets to reach into the pocket of every taxpayer, Republican, Democrat, independent, doesn't matter, and use that money to buy commercials telling you to love the man currently in charge. If the answer to that is yes, if nobody stops it, if nobody even has to say who signed off on it, then that door doesn't close again. The next administration does it too. And the one after that. And eventually it's not a thirty-second spot with a chorus singing "love me." It's the water you swim in every election year, funded by you, whether you asked for it or not.

We'll be right back.

09 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

10 — SEGMENT D: THE THREE HUNDRED BILLION DOLLAR HEIST

Let me talk about a number that ought to stop you cold. Three hundred billion dollars. That is how much the IRS estimates fraudsters steal from the United States government every single year. Not over a decade. Every year. Scammers, identity thieves, phony refund schemes, people gaming the tax system in a hundred different ways, walking off with somewhere up to three hundred billion dollars annually, according to the agency's own estimates.

Sit with that figure for a second, because I want to put it next to some other numbers we have talked about on this show this week.

Earlier we talked about a taxpayer-funded television ad promoting President Trump that started small and then exploded. It launched around fourteen thousand dollars in spending. Within three days it had jumped to four hundred and thirty thousand dollars, running across network television in markets all over the country, according to AdImpact, the firm that tracks media spending. And that number is probably low, because depending on how individual networks classified the ad, the real total could be a lot higher. There is a second ad too, a full minute long, with drone footage of Mount Rushmore at night and clips of the president's speech from the Fourth of July, running on Newsmax during Carl Higbie's show and Greg Kelly's show. Nobody has even said yet how much that one costs, or which part of the federal government is paying for it.

Now compare that to the other story we covered. The Army Reserve sending out an internal message asking commanders whether military police, medics, engineer battalions and a medical brigade with trauma surgery capability could be ready in ninety to one hundred and twenty days. Possibly for Cuba, though the message itself never says the word Cuba. That is real money too. Standing up support battalions, logistics units, forward surgical detachments. That does not happen for free.

So here is my question tonight. If the federal government can find four hundred and thirty thousand dollars to run a love-me jingle on cable news in three days. If it can start planning and staffing for a possible military operation ninety days out. Why, in the name of everything holy, can it not plug a fraud hole that is bleeding out up to three hundred billion dollars a year?

Three hundred billion dollars is not a rounding error. Three hundred billion dollars is bigger than the entire annual budget of most federal agencies combined. It is bigger than what most countries spend on their whole military for a year. It is a number so large that the four hundred and thirty thousand dollars we were just outraged about looks like a rounding error inside a rounding error. You could run that Trump ad, at its new

expanded rate, every single day for close to two thousand years and still not spend as much as the fraudsters take from the IRS in twelve months.

Let that sink in. Two thousand years of that ad, every day, and you still would not catch up to one year of IRS fraud.

So why does this keep happening? Why does a number this big just sit there, year after year, while Washington finds money for everything else it wants to fund?

Part of the answer is that fraud does not have a constituency. Nobody is putting up billboards demanding the government catch identity thieves. There is no cable news host doing a nightly countdown on refund fraud. Nobody storms out of a hall at the United Nations over it, the way that Caribbean delegation walked out on President Trump earlier this week after he told the General Assembly that the Cuban government "will fall" and that "freedom will be coming to Cuba." End quote. That got headlines. Three hundred billion dollars in stolen tax refunds does not get headlines, because there is no dramatic moment attached to it. It is just a slow, quiet bleed, refund by refund, fake filing by fake filing, year after year.

Compare that to what gets Washington's attention. A government-funded ad that Republicans and Democrats both are calling inappropriate gets attention. Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina, a Republican who is not even running for reelection, came out and called that ad "inappropriate," and said it reminded him of something out of former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's playbook. House Democrats with senior committee positions demanded the ad be pulled entirely, calling it, quote, the sort of government propaganda one might expect in North Korea. End quote. That is real bipartisan heat, over four hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

Meanwhile, three hundred billion dollars just walks out the door every year and there is no press conference. No senator holding a poster board on the floor of the chamber. No walkout. Just an estimate buried in an IRS report that most people will never see, because the outrage machine in this country runs on drama, not on math.

And here is the thing about that ad. The law is actually pretty clear that taxpayer money is not supposed to be spent on what the statute calls "publicity or propaganda." There are rules limiting how federal employees can use government resources for partisan political activity. That is not some fringe complaint. That is the law, and lawmakers in both parties said this week they think the administration crossed the line. The White House's answer was that the ad is, quote, educational and unapologetically patriotic. End quote. They put out a statement saying, quote, these public service announcements are about reminding Americans to love their country and understand what makes it worth defending, at home, at our borders, and abroad. End quote. Notice what the White House did not do. It did not say which agency's budget is actually paying for the ad. Nobody has answered that question yet.

So you have got a government that will not tell you which line item is funding a patriotic jingle, but that same government has known about the size of the IRS fraud problem for years and has not fixed it. That is not a partisan point. That is true no matter who is sitting in the Oval Office, because this fraud has been going on across administrations of both parties. The mechanisms for it are well documented. Fake W-two forms. Stolen Social Security numbers used to file fraudulent returns before the real taxpayer even gets a chance to file. Fraudulent claims for tax credits by people who are not entitled to them. Refund checks mailed out or direct-deposited before anyone at the IRS has caught the fraud, because the agency is under pressure to get refunds out fast, and fraudsters know that and exploit the timing gap every single year.

The IRS has an entire division, the Criminal Investigation division, whose job includes chasing this stuff down. They catch some of it. They catch nowhere near enough of it, when the leakage is estimated at up to three hundred billion dollars a year. And every year Congress debates whether to give the IRS more enforcement funding, and every year that debate turns into a political football, with one side saying more IRS agents means the government is coming after regular working people, and the other side saying you need more agents specifically to stop this kind of fraud. Meanwhile the fraud keeps happening at the same staggering scale, because nobody in

either party wants to be the one standing up in an election year saying we need to spend money to hire more IRS agents.

That is the tragedy here. It is not that the technology to catch this fraud does not exist. It is not that nobody knows how the schemes work. It is that fixing it requires sustained, unglamorous, bipartisan investment in enforcement and technology at the IRS, year after year, with no ribbon cutting and no applause line. And Washington, as we have seen this week with a television ad that jumped thirty times in cost in seventy two hours, and a military request sent out with a ninety-day and a one-hundred-twenty-day window attached to it, has plenty of appetite for spending money fast when it wants to. It just does not want to spend it on this.

Ask yourself what that says about priorities. A government that can move at the speed of a television ad buy when it wants to shape how it looks on cable news. A government that can quietly ask its own reserve units to be ready in ninety days for something it will not even name out loud. But somehow cannot summon the same urgency for a leak that costs the American taxpayer up to three hundred billion dollars every single year, money that is not going to schools, not going to roads, not going to anything, just gone, stolen, laundered, spent by criminals who figured out the system faster than the government figured out how to stop them.

That is the real scandal in Washington tonight. Not the ad. Not even the war planning. It is that three hundred billion dollars can disappear every year and barely make the news, while a four hundred and thirty thousand dollar ad buy gets senators from both parties on the floor within seventy two hours. When regular people see that gap, they do not see a government that is careless. They see a government that has simply decided what it cares about, and protecting your tax dollars from theft is not on that list.

We'll be right back.

11 — [BREAK] — COMMERCIAL

[COMMERCIAL — slot for 30s ad]

12 — CLOSING / SIGN-OFF

That is the show tonight. Three stories. Three different agencies. One truth running underneath all of them.

The government is quietly prepping for a fight down in Cuba, and nobody in Washington wants to explain what that fight looks like or how far it goes. The same government is spending your tax dollars on commercials to make itself look good, polishing its own image on your dime. And somewhere along the way, three hundred billion dollars walked right out the back door of the IRS, and the best answer anybody in charge can give you is a shrug.

Different departments. Different headlines. Same pattern. They ask you to hand over your money and your trust, and then they act like explaining themselves is optional. It is not optional. Trust is not something a government gets to assume. It is something a government has to earn, every single day, with straight answers and open books. Right now, on all three of these stories, we are not getting that. We are getting silence, spin, and a whole lot of unanswered questions.

That is not a Democrat problem or a Republican problem. That is an American problem. And the only fix for it is people like you paying attention and asking why. So keep asking why. That is what this show is for.

I want to thank you for spending this hour with me tonight. Out of everything competing for your time, you chose this. That means something to me, and I do not take it lightly.

Come back next Monday at seven. We will have more of this. Straight talk, no spin, no apologies.

Until then, take care of yourselves and take care of each other.

I'm Mark Ford. Good night, America.