



Hurting for Cash, U.S. National Parks Turn to Companies

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Updated on June 20, 2016, 7:30 am

Published on June 17, 2016, 6:00 am



The elevators that carried President Barack Obama 750 feet down into the caves of Carlsbad Caverns are working again, just in time for the first family's visit this week to the national park.

The President and his entourage, including the press, split up into about 8 groups to ride two small elevators down into the caves. Two other elevators, long-out of service, weren't fixed in time and stayed shut. It wasn't perfect, but it worked -- and saved Obama and his family the mile-long hike deep underground to view the New Mexico hidden wonder.

In a cavernous space known as the 'Big Room', he stared upward at stalactites and stalagmites, spiking down from above and shooting up from below. "How cool is this?" Obama said to reporters.

Out of service all year until last month, those elevators were part of the National Park Service's growing backlog of overdue maintenance projects. As Obama travels to New Mexico and California to mark the 100th



That backlog has grown during Obama's presidency as Congress has refused to increase funding for the nation's parks. The park service increasingly looks to corporate sponsorships and licensing deals with companies like Anheuser-Busch InBev NV, American Express Co. and Subaru of America Inc. to help defray its costs.

"It's old and cantankerous," park service spokesman Jeffrey Olson said of the elevator system at Carlsbad Caverns. "And there are things like that all over the park service."

[For a Bloomberg View editorial on the National Parks' budget, click here.](#)

The Obama family will go from Carlsbad Caverns to visit Yosemite National Park on Saturday, according to the White House. After touring the popular sites, Obama will make remarks honoring the upcoming centennial of the park service, created by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916. On Thursday, administration officials lamented the state of the parks' budgets.

"We are relying more on donations every single year. And what used to be a donation to provide the margin of excellence is now really the margin of survival for a lot of these parks," Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said in a conference call with reporters on Thursday. "I didn't expect to be a fundraiser in this job, but I have been, from day one."

Mile-Long Climb

At the caverns, officials say they need about \$44 million to permanently fix the elevators and make other necessary upgrades. Visitors have been forced to make a steep, mile-long trek into and out of the caves this year after the elevators gave out. At Yosemite, park officials have had to delay more than \$555 million in maintenance, including upgrading leaking sewer lines, expanding parking facilities and rehabilitating the popular Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias.

While Obama's last two budget requests included more money for the parks during their centennial celebration, Congress has not approved the full amount. As the maintenance backlog has grown -- up \$440 million just last year -- the park service has considered new funding options, including changing its policy to



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(Updates with Obama tour in 2nd paragraph.)

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