

EXHIBIT 15

Trump Visits the Kennedy Center and Muses on Hosting its Honors Gala

The president had harsh words for “Hamilton,” which canceled a planned tour there after he took over the center, but seemed excited about a long-planned “Les Misérables.”

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By **Shawn McCreesh** and **Javier C. Hernández**

Shawn McCreesh reported from Washington, and Javier C. Hernández from New York.

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President Trump visited the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington on Monday for the first time since he stunned the cultural and political establishment nearly five weeks ago by taking over the institution.

“We’re here to have our first board meeting,” he told reporters as he toured the center with his chief of staff, Susie Wiles, and a few of the people he has appointed to the center’s board, including the country singer Lee Greenwood (he sings “God Bless the U.S.A.”) and the Fox News personalities Laura Ingraham and Maria Bartiromo.

During the board meeting Mr. Trump floated the idea of hosting the Kennedy Center Honors ceremony himself, according to an audio recording of the meeting obtained by The New York Times. Mr. Trump boycotted the ceremony, an annual star-studded gala that is televised on CBS, during his first term after several of the artists who were being honored criticized him.

“The king of ratings, whether we like or not, the king of ratings,” Mr. Trump told the board, referring to himself. He added: “If you announced that, every network will start bidding on it, going crazy, for whatever reason, that’s the way it is.”

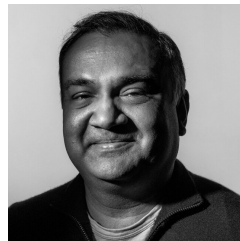
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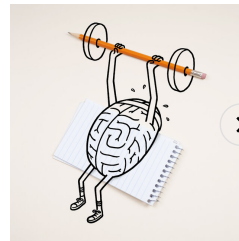
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He also discussed potential honorees, including giving posthumous awards to Luciano Pavarotti and Elvis Presley.

During the day he had some thoughts about programming at the Kennedy Center.

“I never liked ‘Hamilton’ very much,” he said, taking a poke at a show that canceled a planned tour there next year to protest his takeover of the institution, which had long been bipartisan.

When he was a young man Mr. Trump had dreams of one day becoming a Broadway producer himself. Now, he said, the Kennedy Center's focus would be on producing "Broadway hits."

"We're going to get some very good shows," he said. "I guess we have 'Les Miz' coming." (Before he was elected to a second term, the Kennedy Center had announced that "Les Misérables," a longtime Trump favorite, would be performing there in June and July.)

Mr. Trump made himself chairman of the Kennedy Center's board last month after dismissing all of the Biden-era appointees, upending a bipartisan tradition that had endured for decades.

His press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, had said at Monday's briefing that Mr. Trump's would be touring the center with "a business developer mind" and that he would likely have some recommendations about the infrastructure.

After inspecting the place himself, he declared that "the Kennedy Center is in tremendous disrepair." In particular, he took issue with the columns outside ("it's supposed to be covered by something, whether it's marble or whatever, granite") and said he wanted to "bring it into more modern times."

He framed his takeover of the center as part of a larger project which he has long been fixated on: the beautification of the nation's capital. When foreign leaders are in town, they ought to be impressed by the place, he said, and he sees the center as a jewel box that can be used to that end. "I thought it was very important to make this good," he said. "It's a very big part of the fabric of Washington D.C."

The center, like other federally owned properties, has deferred some maintenance on its building because of budget constraints. It receives only a small portion of its \$268 million budget — about \$43 million, or 16 percent — from the federal government. That money is not spent on programming but is earmarked for operations, maintenance and repairs of the property.

While Mr. Trump and his entourage were touring the center, a small group of protesters convened at a traffic circle out front. They held signs that warned about fascists and oligarchs. "He has no business being head of the Kennedy Center, the man has no artistic bones in his body," said one of the protesters, a 27-year-old law student at George Washington University named Theodore Shapira. "I'm sure he'll gut it and continue to staff it with sycophants."

Ahead of the board meeting on Monday, Mr. Trump introduced a resolution giving him more oversight of the selection of artists and performers recognized at the annual Kennedy Center Honors program. "In the past, I mean, these are radical left lunatics that have been chosen," he told the board, according to the recording. "I didn't like it."

The new resolution would give Mr. Trump the power to hire and fire members of the committee that helps decide who receives the honor. Since the program began in 1978, honorees have been chosen without White House interference.

Ahead of the president's visit several portraits had been hung on the center's walls showing Mr. Trump; the first lady, Melania Trump; and Vice President JD Vance and his wife, Usha Vance.

It is not yet clear what sort of artists Mr. Trump would like to see honored at the Kennedy Center. He has shown an affinity for stars like Mel Gibson, Sylvester Stallone and Jon Voight, all of whom have supported Mr. Trump and whom he recently appointed as ambassadors to Hollywood. His supporters include musicians like Kid Rock and Mr. Greenwood.

And it remains to be seen whether Mr. Trump's team can raise enough revenue through ticket sales and private donations to keep the Kennedy Center running at its current size. The center stages more than 2,000 performances each year.

When he took over the center last month, Mr. Trump ousted the longtime chairman, the financier David M. Rubenstein, the center's largest donor, and fired Deborah F. Rutter, the center's president for more than a decade.

Mr. Trump, who knows Mr. Rubenstein socially, seemed to express disappointment with his stewardship of the center. "I know the person who was in charge of it and he's a good man," the president said. "I never realized this was in such bad shape." (Mr. Rubenstein did not immediately respond to a request for comment.)

The president also appeared to take issue with the center's 2019 expansion, which cost \$250 million, saying that "they built these rooms that nobody's going to use."

And Mr. Trump criticized the cost of unionized labor at the Kennedy Center, saying that Mr. Greenwood had wanted "to sing a little song" at today's board meeting but that the labor costs made it too expensive.

"They wanted \$30,000 to move a piano," he said.

After tossing Ms. Rutter out, Mr. Trump installed a loyalist, Richard Grenell, a former ambassador to Germany, as the center's president. Mr. Grenell recently brought on Donna Arduin Kauranen as chief financial officer. She has served in a number of budget and finance roles for former Republican governors, including Jeb Bush in Florida, Arnold Schwarzenegger in California and George E. Pataki in New York.

In a prelude to Mr. Trump's appearance on Monday, Mr. and Ms. Vance visited the Kennedy Center on Thursday for a concert by the National Symphony Orchestra, one of the center's main ensembles.

The Vances were loudly booed while taking their seats, and a video of the incident circulated widely on social media. Mr. Grenell denounced the episode, saying: "Diversity is our strength. We must do better. We must welcome EVERYONE. We will not allow the Kennedy Center to be an intolerant place."

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