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# *Office of Inspector General*

# *Audit Report*

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*Third Interim Report on Travel Policies  
and Practices of Political Appointees*

*Department of Transportation*

*Report Number: FI-2000-119  
Date Issued: September 8, 2000*



September 8, 2000

The Honorable Fred Thompson  
Chairman, Committee on Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your request of February 29, 2000, the Office of Inspector General initiated a Departmentwide review of policies and practices regarding political activities and travel by Department of Transportation (DOT) employees. Your request posed seven questions pertaining to DOT.

This letter is our third interim response to your request. On May 1, 2000, our initial response included complete answers to four of your seven questions. The four questions requested: (1) DOT's policies and guidelines regarding political activity by employees; (2) the process within DOT to review claims for official travel; (3) DOT policy on combining official travel with political travel; and (4) a description of the systems in place to ensure that employees are abiding by the Hatch Act. The policies and procedures did not change since May 1, so no updated information is necessary.

On July 14, 2000, our second interim response provided complete answers to the remaining three questions concerning political travel and campaigning between April 1, 1998, and May 31, 2000. The three questions requested: (1) the number of trips taken by DOT employees or officials involving a mix of official and political travel; (2) whether any staff, including but not limited to protective details or advance personnel, have accompanied political appointees on travel involving a political component; and (3) how much time those employees who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate spent campaigning over the last 2 years. This response provides answers to the same three questions covering the period June 1, 2000, through July 31, 2000.

For the period June 1 through July 31, 2000, DOT employed 86 political appointees (2 were new hires and 6 departed since our last response). Of the 86 appointees, 15 were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate (PAS officials), 30 were noncareer Senior Executive Service (SES) officials, and 41 were Schedule C officials.

***Committee Question: How many trips taken by DOT employees or officials included a mix of official and political travel?***

### **PAS Officials**

For the 15 PAS officials, we reviewed all 70 of their travel vouchers and any corresponding travel itineraries for travel from June 1 through July 31, 2000. We also reviewed information provided from their certified responses to our questionnaires. We found that one trip was taken by the Secretary of Transportation and two PAS officials (the Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs and the Acting Deputy Administrator for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration) that included a mix of official and political travel, and was subject to the Hatch Act requirements.

The Hatch Act requires an employee to apportion the cost of mixed travel based on the time spent on political activities and the time spent performing official duties. For the Secretary who attended a political event during this trip, we reviewed DOT's cost allocation for the political portion and found it to be reasonable. DOT has requested the appropriate reimbursement. The other two PAS officials did not attend the political event; therefore, no allocation was necessary.

### **Noncareer SES and Schedule C Officials**

For the 71 noncareer SES and Schedule C officials, we reviewed all 144 of their travel vouchers and corresponding travel itineraries for the period June 1 through July 31, 2000. We found that three noncareer SES and Schedule C officials accompanied the Secretary on one trip that included a mix of official and political activity. Through our questionnaires and interviews, the three employees stated they did not attend the political event.

***Committee Question: Have any staff, including but not limited to protective details or advance personnel, accompanied political appointees on travel involving a political component?***

There was only one trip involving a political event between June 1 and July 31, 2000. Eight DOT employees accompanied the Secretary on the part of this trip that involved a political component. The eight employees consisted of two PAS officials, three noncareer SES and Schedule C officials, and three career employees. Of the eight employees, one was a member of the Secretary's security detail (a career employee), and one was an advance person (a Schedule C official). The duties for security personnel can include attendance at functions while traveling with the Secretary, however security personnel may not participate in political activities during normal duty hours. Through our questionnaires and interviews, we found that the security person and the other seven employees stated they did not attend the political event. We found no violations of the Hatch Act.

***Committee Question: How much time have those employees who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate spent campaigning over the last 2 years?***

In our prior response that covered the 26-month period from April 1, 1998, through May 31, 2000, we reported that 14 of the 20 PAS officials who were employed by DOT during that period did not perform any campaigning. For the remaining six officials, five estimated that the time they spent campaigning ranged from 1 to 5 days, and totaled about 90 hours. All five officials stated the campaigning was performed on their own time and at their own expense. For that same period, the Secretary spent about 400 hours campaigning or at political events, of which about 270 hours were after normal work hours.

For the period from June 1 through July 31, 2000, we reviewed travel vouchers and travel itineraries for the 15 PAS officials onboard during that time. (The one PAS official who departed during the period did not incur any official travel during the period.) We also obtained certified responses to questionnaires from all 15 PAS officials.

Of the 15 PAS officials, 12 did not perform any campaigning. Two of the remaining three officials (the Federal Aviation Administrator and the Research and Special Programs Administrator) reported that the time they spent campaigning during this period totaled 11 hours. Of the 11 hours, 9 hours were on their personal time and 2 hours were during normal work hours. The Secretary spent about 12 hours campaigning or at political events, of which about 10 hours were on his personal time and about 2 hours were during normal work hours. The Hatch Act allows the Secretary and other PAS officials to participate in political activities while on duty.

As you requested, we are continuing our review, and we will provide interim reports every 60 days. Our next report will cover the period from August 1 through September 30, 2000.

If I can answer any questions or be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-1959, or my Acting Deputy, Todd J. Zinser, at (202) 366-6767.

Sincerely,

Kenneth M. Mead  
Inspector General

cc: DOT General Counsel