

**EXAMINING CONFERENCE AND TRAVEL SPENDING  
ACROSS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JANUARY 14, 2014

Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.fdsys.gov/>

Printed for the use of the  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

88-270 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2014

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Internet: [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov) Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

THOMAS R. CARPER, Delaware *Chairman*

CARL LEVIN, Michigan	TOM COBURN, Oklahoma
MARK L. PRYOR, Arkansas	JOHN McCAIN, Arizona
MARY L. LANDRIEU, Louisiana	RON JOHNSON, Wisconsin
CLAIRE McCASKILL, Missouri	ROB PORTMAN, Ohio
JON TESTER, Montana	RAND PAUL, Kentucky
MARK BEGICH, Alaska	MICHAEL B. ENZI, Wyoming
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin	KELLY AYOTTE, New Hampshire
HEIDI HEITKAMP, North Dakota	JEFF CHIESA, New Jersey

RICHARD J. KESSLER, *Staff Director*

JOHN P. KILVINGTON, *Deputy Staff Director*

JONATHAN M. KRADEN, *Senior Counsel*

KEITH B. ASHDOWN, *Minority Staff Director*

CHRISTOPHER J. BARKLEY, *Minority Deputy Staff Director*

PATRICK J. BAILEY, *Minority Counsel*

LAURA W. KILBRIDE, *Chief Clerk*

LAUREN M. CORCORAN, *Hearing Clerk*

# CONTENTS

Opening statements:	Page
Senator Carper .....	1
Senator Coburn .....	3
Senator Johnson .....	16
Senator Heitkamp .....	19
Senator Tester .....	22
Senator Ayotte .....	26
Prepared statements:	
Senator Carper .....	45

## WITNESSES

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2014

Hon. Beth F. Cobert, Deputy Director for Management, Office of Management and Budget .....	6
Hon. Daniel M. Tangherlini, Administrator, U.S. General Services Administration .....	8
Hon. Michael E. Horowitz, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice .....	31
Hon. Brian D. Miller, Inspector General, U.S. General Services Administration .....	32
Hon. J. Russell George, Inspector General for Tax Administration, U.S. Department of the Treasury .....	33

## ALPHABETICAL LIST OF WITNESSES

Cobert, Hon. Beth F.	
Testimony .....	6
Prepared statement .....	48
George, Hon. J. Russell:	
Testimony .....	33
Prepared statement .....	65
Horowitz, Hon. Michael E.:	
Testimony .....	31
Prepared statement .....	57
Miller, Hon. Brian D.:	
Testimony .....	32
Prepared statement .....	62
Tangherlini, Hon. Daniel M.	
Testimony .....	8
Prepared statement .....	52

## APPENDIX

Additional statements for the Record from:	
Senator Reid .....	72
3RNet .....	74
The American Association for the Advancement of Science .....	75
American Association for Dental Research .....	78
The American Association of Immunologists .....	80
American College of Healthcare Executives .....	84
American Composites Manufactures Association .....	86
American College of Rheumatology .....	87
American Chemical Society .....	89
American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America .....	91

IV

	Page
Additional statements for the Record from—Continued	
The Associated General Contractors of America .....	93
American Hotel and Lodging Association .....	98
Affordable Housing Management Association of Iowa and Nebraska .....	102
American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics .....	103
American Institute of Certified Public Accountants .....	108
The American Physiological Society .....	113
The American Horticulture Industry Association .....	115
Association for Molecular Pathology .....	117
American Physical Society .....	119
The American Society of Association Executives .....	121
American Society of Human Genetics .....	128
American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers .....	129
The American Society of Microbiology .....	131
American Society for Nutrition .....	134
Association of the United States Army .....	135
American Veterinary Medical Association .....	140
Consumer Healthcare Products Association .....	142
Consulting Management Innovators .....	145
Case Management Society of America .....	147
Entomological Society of America .....	149
Ecological Society of America .....	151
Federation Of American Societies for Experimental Biology .....	153
Genetics Society of America .....	155
The Geological Society of America .....	158
Government Managers Coalition .....	160
Human Factors and Ergonomics Society .....	163
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society .....	165
International Association of Fire Chiefs .....	167
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers .....	171
International Franchise Association .....	174
Irrigation Association .....	176
Midstates Development Inc. ....	179
Materials Research Society .....	181
The National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators .....	183
National Affordable Housing Management Association .....	185
The National Automatic Merchandising Association .....	187
National Association of State Credit Union Supervisors and National Association of Insurance Commissioners .....	189
Navy League of the United States .....	191
National Groundwater Association .....	193
National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association .....	194
National Laboratory Directors Council Executive Committee .....	196
Office of Management and Budget .....	199
Orthopaedic Research Society .....	205
Research!America .....	206
Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering .....	208
Sample of Conferences chart submitted by Senator Coburn .....	209
Security Industry Association .....	210
Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology .....	211
SPIE The International Society for Optics and Photonics .....	213
U.S. Public Policy Council of the Association for Computing Machinery ....	215
WorldatWork .....	216
University of Delaware Research Office .....	218

# **EXAMINING CONFERENCE AND TRAVEL SPENDING ACROSS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2014**

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Committee met, pursuant to other business, at 10:35 a.m., in room SD-342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Thomas R. Carper, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Carper, Pryor, Tester, Heitkamp, Coburn, Johnson, and Ayotte.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CARPER**

Chairman CARPER. All right. We are going to start the hearing at this time. Thank you. I want to say thanks to our guests. Beth Cobert, you look none the worse for wear, nor do you, Dan. We are grateful that you are here and happy to hear really a little bit of an update on how you are doing in your responsibilities. Dan has been at it a little bit longer than you, Beth, but we are grateful for your presence today and your testimony.

I want to especially thank Dr. Coburn and his staff for all the work they have done in helping to put this hearing together and, frankly, a lot of work they have done on these issues.

Today's hearing is part of our Committee's continuous efforts to look into, as Senator Landrieu has just said, every nook and cranny of Federal spending and seek ways to improve results and save some money.

I was at a State Chamber of Commerce dinner last night, and after the dinner was over, back in Wilmington, one of the attendees said essentially these words. He said, "I do not mind you making me pay some extra taxes. I just do not want you to waste our money." And I agree with that, and I am sure that we all agree with that sentiment about not wanting to waste their money or our money either.

But, in particular, we are here today to discuss the progress agencies have made in cutting spending on conferences and travel, while better ensuring that the dollars being spent today and in the future make possible a more effective and efficient government and hopefully a better country.

In this time of deep Federal deficits and challenging economic times, the people we work for, the taxpayers, expect us to be good stewards of their hard-earned money.

Unfortunately, in the last several years, several Inspectors General (IGs) have documented wasteful and excessive spending at government conferences. The Department of Justice (DOJ), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have all made the news, and not in a positive way, for excessive conference and travel spending.

The goal of our hearing today, though, is not just to reexamine the well-documented excesses of the past. That has already been done in the media and in other committees, including this Committee. But, rather, the reason we are holding today's hearing, the principal reason, is to get a better picture of the current state of agency spending on conferences, training, and on travel and to understand if the culture that contributed to the problems we saw at Justice, at GSA, and the IRS has changed.

There is good news to report. In May 2012, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance that required agencies to reduce Federal spending on agency travel and to improve accountability on conference spending.

In addition, the challenging budget climate of the last few years has forced agencies to operate with less Federal funding, which has, in turn, curtailed spending on travel, on training, and conferences, while focusing the dollars that are spent on activities and events whose value to agencies, whose value to organizations, and to citizens is clear.

As a result of these events, it is my understanding that in fiscal year (FY) 2013 agency conference and travel spending has decreased by more than \$3 billion as compared to fiscal year 2010. I think we will all agree that is a significant reduction.

At today's hearing, I want to hear from our witnesses about where things currently stand in this important area. Specifically, I would like to hear answers to some of the following questions, and I will just run through these.

One question is: How much are agencies currently spending on conferences and travel?

A second question would be: How has the OMB guidance been adopted and implemented across our government?

A third question would be: What changes have the Department of Justice, GSA, and IRS made to their internal policies to address the problems found in those agencies?

And, finally, what lessons have been learned and what steps have been taken to make Federal agencies better stewards of taxpayer dollars with respect to conferences and travel?

To help us answer these questions, we have two excellent panels for our hearing today.

On our first panel, we have Beth Cobert, the Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget, and Dan Tangherlini, the Administrator at GSA.

On our second panel, we are pleased to welcome three Inspectors General from the Department of Justice, GSA, and from the Treasury Department, each of whom issued a report uncovering wasteful spending at those government agencies.

We are fortunate to have two distinguished panels and witnesses for our hearing today. We very much look forward to your testimony.

Before wrapping up, I want to briefly touch on one issue and that is the importance of conferences and the value derived from these types of meetings. I want to be clear about one thing, though. There is no reasonable justification for the spending that took place at some government conferences in recent years. It was wasteful, it was expensive, and just, I really think, inexcusable.

I do like to say, though, as some of you know, that in adversity lies opportunity. And it certainly appears to me that in light of both these, if you will, scandals and budget cuts, some good has come about in the sense that agencies have found ways to cut conference and meeting costs through technology, through conference calls, webinars, and other means.

However, we must not forget the value of face-to-face meetings amongst agencies and, more importantly, with those who work outside of our Federal Government, really for whom in many cases we work.

When properly planned and managed, conferences can serve a legitimate and often times necessary purpose of fostering collaboration and partnerships between government employees, State regulators, academia, and industry. And while it is important that agencies make efforts to eliminate any wasteful spending on conferences and travel, we must be careful that we do not unduly restrict the ability of our agencies to interact with outside groups and our citizens.

This Committee has heard from numerous groups—including State regulatory agencies, nonprofits, military associations, and scientists—that are very concerned that conference and travel limitations could cut off their primary means of communication with Federal agencies and affect their ability to interact with the government.

These are important concerns that the Executive Branch and Congress must consider when shaping policy, and I look forward to discussing them with our witnesses today.

Finally, I would also note that the Committee has received a number of written statements from a wide range of interested groups and individuals, including the Majority Leader, that address the matters that are being discussed here today, and I would ask that all of these statements be included as part of the hearing record.<sup>1</sup> Without objection.

Dr. Coburn, thanks very much, and thanks for all the work that you have done on this.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR COBURN**

Senator COBURN. Thank you.

Deputy Director Cobert and Administrator Tangherlini, welcome. I believe this is both of your first testimony back before the whole Committee. I appreciate you being here. I think it is an important opportunity to followup oversight that we have done outside of the context of the media scandal on government conferences.

Today we are going to get some real hard facts from the witnesses about the realities at their agencies and across government. There has been a significant amount of embarrassment, not only

<sup>1</sup>Additional statements for the Record appear in the Appendix on page 74.

for the Congress but for the Executive Branch, over the last 3 years in terms of the excesses that have occurred.

Just for a little history, the Department of Justice conferences jumped from under \$50 million in 2008 to over \$90 million in 2010. GSA spent \$822,000 to hold a conference in Las Vegas that included mind readers, clowns, and videos by GSA joking about how much money they waste. IRS spent a staggering \$4.1 million on their conference in Anaheim that, once again, included parody videos and was an unnecessary waste of taxpayer dollars.

But there are many more wasteful conferences that did not capture very much attention. The Army was spending more than \$10 million every single year on a conference in D.C. Thankfully, this last year that was put to a halt and cut back to \$1 million.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) spent \$6.1 million on just two conferences, and their employees improperly accepted gifts and upgrades from vendors.

The Department of Education (ED) had a conference just this last month that cost almost \$1 million. Supposedly, the Department cannot fund Head Start because of sequestration, but can throw a \$1 million party in Las Vegas. I had requested them to cancel this. They did not, and we have seen the results of that conference.

Effective oversight by the Inspector General community and Congress brought these embarrassments to light, and to the Inspectors General, I say thank you. The Executive Branch has taken some positive steps to address some of these problems. The new guidance from OMB and reviews of internal controls of the agencies have reduced the number of conferences. But these embarrassing memories will fade away over time as new leadership and new employees enter Federal service.

Whether it is 5 years or 10 years from now, eventually government will slip back into old habits, the old way of doing things, and history, my fear is, will repeat itself. That is why I believe it is so important for Congress to take action and enact legislation that will permanently prevent excessive conference spending.

Legislation that I have introduced with Senators Ayotte, McCain, and Enzi in July would have prevented every single one of the wasteful conferences that I mentioned earlier from taking place. Under the Conference Accountability Act of 2013, no agency can spend more than \$500,000 on any single conference or send more than 50 employees to an international conference.

The bill also requires significant improvements to transparency to the taxpayers by requiring agencies to put all their conferences, including costs, sponsors, videos, and presentations, on their websites.

I really do not think the IRS employees would have made their Star Trek video had they known it would have gone up on IRS.gov. I do not think it would have ever happened.

Hopefully this Committee will take up this bill sometime this year. I thank you, Deputy Director Cobert and Administrator Tangherlini, for the excellent work you have done in this area, but it is time for Congress to do its part as well. Thank you.

Chairman CARPER. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Coburn.

I will say this: I have said it in this Committee before to my colleagues—sometimes you can get a lot done by asking the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to do a study. Sometimes you can get a lot done by introducing a bill. Sometimes you get a lot done by doing a hearing. And a lot of good has been done in this area. Is there more that can be done? Sure, there is. But I just would remind us not to overlook that some progress is being made, and there is more that can be made, and hopefully we will find out today more about the progress that has been made and what more that we might need to do.

Let me just introduce briefly our witnesses. Our first witness—and I think this is your first time back since you were confirmed, Ms. Cobert, and we are delighted to see you. I am told by others that you have settled into your new—you actually did not settle into it nicely. You hit the deck running, and we have heard great reports, as we have on Mr. Tangherlini. But you were confirmed on October 6 last fall. As Deputy Director for Management, Ms. Cobert is responsible for oversight and coordination of the Administration's procurement, financial management, e-government, performance and personnel management, and information and regulatory policies. The Deputy Director for Management also serves as the Nation's Federal Chief Performance Officer (CPO), and prior to her service in government, Ms. Cobert served nearly 30 years at McKinsey & Company as director and senior partner.

We thank you so much for your service and for joining us today. We really look forward to your testimony and the chance to ask you some questions.

The next witness is Dan Tangherlini. Dan, nice to see you. Mr. Tangherlini is the Administrator for the General Services Administration and was sworn in as Administrator on July 5, 2013, following his 15 months of service as the Acting Administrator at GSA. Throughout his career, Mr. Tangherlini has been recognized for fiscal and management leadership. Before joining GSA, he was confirmed by the Senate in 2009 to serve as the Treasury Department's Assistant Secretary for Management, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Chief Performance Officer. And in these roles, Mr. Tangherlini has served as the principal policy adviser on the development and execution of the budget and performance plans for Treasury and the internal management of the Treasury and its bureaus.

Mr. Tangherlini, we would like to thank you for joining us today, as well.

Before I turn it over to Ms. Cobert, I would say that among the things we talk about here on this Committee are how we can—to the extent putting on our Governmental Affairs hat on this Committee as opposed to just the Homeland Security hat, we can be a lot more effective in creating leverage for what we are trying to accomplish, and that is to get better results for less money. If we can partner with similar responsibilities and interests, and that includes OMB, GAO, GSA, includes all the IGs, a lot of private groups from around the country who are interested in getting better results for less money. So I am pleased that we have this new partnership that seems to be taking hold, and I think the folks who sent us here for these jobs are going to be, I think, encouraged by

what they are going to hear today, always knowing that we can do better.

All right. Ms. Cobert, you are on. My clock says 7 minutes. If you want to go a little bit beyond that, that is OK, but not by much, please. Ms. Cobert, thank you. Welcome.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. BETH F. COBERT,<sup>1</sup> DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR MANAGEMENT, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET**

Ms. COBERT. Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Committee, for the invitation to discuss travel and conference spending activity in the Federal Government. Today I will mainly focus on the efforts to reshape how conferences are conducted in the Federal Government.

As stewards of taxpayers' dollars, the Federal Government must spend money wisely as well as find improvements and efficiencies in fiscal oversight. Over the last several years, the Administration has reduced conference spending in the Federal Government by rethinking how, why, and where conferences are conducted as well as increasing our use of technology in order to reduce travel costs.

While the Administration has taken important steps to reduce conference spending, it is critical to recognize the important role that conferences play in the Federal Government. Conferences enable the sharing of knowledge among large groups and also bring together dispersed communities. They facilitate collaboration and often spark innovation. As an example, the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Sovereign Challenge Conference provided an opportunity for international participants to engage in discussions of threats to national security, explore possible solutions and best practices, encourage individual and cooperative actions, and build relationships with and among international attendees. The face-to-face interactions afforded by the conference proceedings spurred further collaboration that assisted USSOCOM in achieving its mission.

Beyond facilitating collaboration, there are other times when physical collocation is both helpful and necessary. This is often the case with the scientific community. The primary goal for a scientific conference is to bring a community of scientists and engineers together and provide opportunities for interaction, to exchange emerging ideas and thinking. In reviewing research at conferences, the U.S. science and engineering community employees and program managers not only stay abreast of their Federal research and development (R&D) investment portfolios but also see significant cost savings in lieu of performing multiple site visits to other researchers' laboratories. In these cases, convening Federal employees and external stakeholders at a single location sometimes can be the most efficient and cost-effective means for carrying out government activities.

It is important to reiterate that while conferences can perform useful functions, conference-related spending, as well as all administrative spending, must be managed in a responsible way. This Administration has taken several steps to ensure we are managing

---

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement for Ms. Cobert appears in the Appendix on page 48.

our spending effectively. The Administration has taken five specific actions which I have outlined in my written testimony to reduce costs and strengthen controls on conferences and travel spending.

The Administration's efforts are paying off. In fiscal year 2013, agencies reduced travel costs by \$3 billion compared to fiscal year 2010 levels. While we are happy to see costs reduced, we will continue our efforts to maintain efficient spending. To maintain this lower level of spending, agencies are evaluating and rethinking how they conduct conferences that support their mission while keeping spending in control.

For example, in 2013, the Department of the Treasury achieved \$181 million in travel savings. They did this by implementing more restrictive guidance, increasing the use of information technology (IT)-enhanced tools, reducing the number of employees attending conferences, reducing the number of participants attending training events, and canceling multiple annual conferences.

Additionally, the Department of Interior achieved \$99 million in fiscal year 2013 travel savings by implementing a comprehensive program to manage conference activities and spending. This included close scrutiny of all conferences as well as Deputy Secretary review of all conferences over \$100,000. Interior also continues to increase the use of technology in lieu of travel.

The Department of Defense (DOD) reduced spending on hosting conferences with a total cost of more than \$100,000 each by a total of \$69 million in fiscal year 2013. Consistent with OMB direction, DOD instituted robust conference oversight procedures, combined previously separate conferences, canceled many conferences, and increased visibility through the implementation of a new, centralized conference reporting tool that was integrated with the Defense Travel System.

The Administration remains committed to responsibly managing conference activities and ensuring that conference spending across the government supports mission-critical activities. It is imperative that the Federal Government continue to improve how we conduct business and provide services to the American people while increasing public transparency. It is also important that our efforts not undercut or prevent agencies from achieving their mission. While recognizing the importance of conference review and reporting requirements, it is also critical that these processes do not create burdensome additional costs.

Moving forward, we are continuing to sharpen our understanding of both the value of conferences to mission-critical departmental activities and the opportunities to reduce expenditures. Both are central to good stewardship of the taxpayer dollar.

In my private sector experience, we faced similar issues in terms of how to spend dollars in the best way possible on conferences and travel. I see the same need within the Federal Government. I look forward to using what I have learned in my prior position to continue to help expand the progress agencies are already making in smartly managing travel and conference costs.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman CARPER. Good. Thanks so much.

Mr. Tangherlini, you are recognized, please.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. DANIEL M. TANGHERLINI,<sup>1</sup>  
ADMINISTRATOR, U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Good morning, Chairman Carper, Dr. Coburn, Members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Dan Tangherlini, and I am the Administrator of the General Services Administration. I am happy to be here this morning to join Deputy Director for Management Cobert, Inspector General Brian Miller, and the other IGs present to provide testimony on this important subject.

The mission of GSA is to deliver the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology services to government and the American people. GSA's travel policies reflect this mission. GSA has instituted internal travel and conference policies that reduce costs, provide strong oversight, and ensure that travel only occurs when necessary.

We have put rigorous controls and oversight mechanisms in place to ensure that all proposed travel and conference expenses are cost-effective, serve legitimate needs, and have appropriate levels of review.

Now travel can only be approved when it is essential to our mission and when all other alternatives, including videoconferencing, teleconferencing, and webinars, have been considered.

Conferences require submission of a detailed justification, a proposed budget, and review and approval from multiple divisions. Additionally, GSA requires online training regarding conference attendance for GSA employees through our conference attendance training module.

In line with the Administration's policies, GSA has also provided greater transparency into conference expenses. All approved, agency-sponsored conferences with a cost of over \$100,000 are posted on a publicly available website that includes the budget and a justification for why the conference was held. In fiscal year 2013, GSA held no conferences above that amount.

All told, these policies have dramatically reduced costs, improved oversight, and made certain that travel and conference expenses are fully justified and mission-related. In fiscal years 2012 and 2013, GSA saved more than \$68 million in avoided travel and transportation costs.

To support these responsible and cost-effective travel policies governmentwide, GSA has looked for ways we can assist agencies by providing tools to help them better manage their travel and conference costs. For example, to help agencies prioritize use of federally owned space, GSA has created an online tool known as "Federal Meeting Facilities," which identifies Federal agencies that have conference and meeting space for agency use. The tool allows agencies to search and sort through a variety of different spaces controlled by the Federal Government, with contact information for the agency point of contact to work with to secure the space.

Another tool is GSA's E-Gov Travel Services 2, which will further consolidate online travel booking services, driving additional cost savings and efficiencies, while delivering improved accountability and reducing waste. This tool will adhere to regulations and sup-

---

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Tangherlini appears in the Appendix on page 52.

port policy for conference travel spending reporting and other travel-related activities, in order to both meet the requirements of OMB and to provide greater transparency for customer agencies.

GSA is also providing data to our partners that will allow them to make more informed decisions about where to host conferences, when they are determined to be necessary. GSA's Conference Planning Tool compares potential destinations by major cost drivers, such as contract airfare and per diem rates, enabling agencies to make data-backed decisions on where conferences should be held. GSA is training administrative officers in over 20 Federal agencies on how to identify low-cost destinations and venues for conferences and meetings.

Additionally, GSA eliminated what was known as the "conference lodging allowance." This allowance allowed authorized travelers attending a conference to exceed the maximum lodging per diem rate by up to 25 percent, if staying at the site of the conference.

Finally, in 2012, GSA formed the Governmentwide Travel Advisory Committee to work with all those involved in Federal travel to investigate how we can reduce the government's travel costs long term. The purpose of this committee is to bring together stakeholders from throughout multiple levels of government and the travel industry to review existing travel policies, processes, and procedures to determine ways agencies can achieve their mission-related travel needs in an effective and efficient manner at the lowest possible cost. To ensure transparency on how recommendations have been formulated, committee business is posted publicly, in line with the rules for Federal Advisory Committees.

GSA understands the importance of ensuring that government travel is both prudent and cost-effective, and we are committed to supporting this priority. We have rigorous internal travel policies, provide tools to other agencies to help them make more informed travel and conference spending decisions, and we are working on broader reforms and programs that would result in greater savings long term. We are confident that these efforts will result in significant savings for both the Federal Government and the American people.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I welcome any questions you have.

Chairman CARPER. Thank you both very much.

Let me just start off by asking the same question of both of you. What do you think went wrong? How did we go off the tracks in past years?

Ms. COBERT. Let me start, and I will let Dan continue. I think the procedures that the Administration has put in place in terms of both oversight and public transparency are one of the critical elements in terms of the processes that you need to have in place and the culture of responsibility that is important, having made those changes, and what I think is a critical step to ensure that we have an ongoing and permanent change to the actions that may have transpired earlier.

Chairman CARPER. Mr. Tangherlini, where did we go wrong?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Well, I can only speak for the General Services Administration, and I think actually the Inspector General did a fantastic job putting together a report that outlined the many dif-

ferent areas where we went wrong in the case of the GSA Western Regions Conference.

I think what we have really been focusing on is understanding how we can make sure that our mission of our agency is reflected in every action we take, and the fundamental mission of this agency is to save money and reduce costs. I think focusing on administration-wide efforts around transparency, agency-specific efforts around creating a clearer culture and organizational accountability and responsibility, a stronger sense of reporting, following on a variety of Executive Orders and requirements from OMB, and then just a smarter engagement of our own people and understanding how we can better design our systems to provide transparency and checks and balances within the organization. So if there is something that seems to be going off track, we catch it long before it turns into events like what we saw in 2010.

Chairman CARPER. Ms. Cobert, you had a lot of years at McKinsey & Company, and I would be interested in knowing how your experience there in the private sector working for three decades would inform your perspectives and your ideas of how we actually build on the work that has been done in the last year or so.

Ms. COBERT. In my time at McKinsey, one of the areas where I did focus was actually taking a hard look at our own spending on conferences and travel, particularly as they related to internal training.

Chairman CARPER. How could that inform what we—

Ms. COBERT. So I think we learned a couple things from that effort. One was it was really critical to start with the question of what was the purpose for which people were being pulled together, and if you looked at that, particularly as technology has expanded, were there other ways to either convey information and get the benefits that in the past would have required people to fly, in our case usually very long distances at very high cost, taking, frankly, a considerable amount of time.

We learned that there were a number of activities that you could really use, in some ways even more effectively, by taking advantage of technology. It provided a chance for people, for example, to get together over videoconferencing multiple times instead of just a single interaction.

So I think the question is: How can you take a tool like that and use videoconferencing even more in the Federal Government? It is a skill also that people get better at. The more you interact that way, the more comfortable you become, the more you can have those interactions.

So I think there is an important lesson to be learned about how to apply technology, to be able to not just replace what you are doing but to have to do it differently in a way that captures even more benefits, at lower cost.

But we also learned that there were important times to bring people together, and one of the elements, I think, that was particularly important was focusing on if you were going to bring people together, how were you going to use that time well? If someone was going to stand up and deliver a PowerPoint presentation, you could probably execute that equally effectively and cost less money with something like a webinar. But if you wanted to have a real dia-

logue, a real problem-solving session, that was harder to do when people were not in the same place.

So what we have changed was not just how frequently we brought people together, and we did it much less frequently, but to really make sure we were using that time most productively when we had people together in the same room.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Those are very helpful comments.

Mr. Tangherlini, do you want to add anything or take anything away?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I would just extend those remarks and say for us at GSA we really used the attention that was brought to this matter and the mistakes that were made to really focus and ask big questions about how we were spending money, particularly around travel, and ask the question: Are there other ways to get that work done? And as a result, we have seen a substantial decrease, a more than 80-percent decrease in our travel expenditures over the last couple years.

Chairman CARPER. All right. I think you mentioned—and I did as well—that if you look at spending for travel, conferences, et al., we saw that amount reduced by about \$3 billion last year compared to 2010. I do not know if 2010 was a high watermark or not. Do you have any idea what the numbers looked like in 2009, 2008, and so forth?

Ms. COBERT. I do not have the 2009 numbers, but we can get those for you.

Chairman CARPER. Any idea, Mr. Tangherlini?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. In GSA, 2010 was at the higher end of our historical trend, but it was pretty much where things had been for quite some time. We went back and looked back 10 or even 15 years and saw that we had been building toward 2010. The simple fact is, I think we really needed to take a good, hard look as we did through our top-to-bottom review of the agency, how we are aligning ourselves, what were our expectations, how did we provide those services, and what should be our assumptions going forward.

Chairman CARPER. All right. We can all think of conferences that we have attended, whether you have done it as a physician, a business person, an auditor, a farmer, or a rancher. I remember going to some conferences when I was State treasurer and learning a whole lot as a young pup. When I was elected, I was about 29. I learned a whole lot about cash management, learned a whole lot about investments, learned a lot about pensions, deferred compensation. They were enormously helpful.

I can also remember some conferences I went to back then that were not so helpful or so informative, and one of the things I most loved about being Governor was being with my colleagues from around the country and learning from them and having the kind of informal discussions on the record and formal sessions, but really off the record and over dinner, breakfast, or lunch and at the end of the day.

I just want to ask—and this is my last question, and then I will turn it to Dr. Coburn, but obviously we need to rein in excessive and wasteful spending. We have talked about that. But how do we make sure that these current restrictions do not negatively affect

an agency's ability to interact with those outside of government, the people we work for and work with?

Mr. Tangherlini, do you want to take the first shot at that? And then we will go to Ms. Cobert and then to Dr. Coburn.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Mr. Chairman, I think that is a very reasonable concern, and that is one where we are absolutely concerned about and we are working very closely with our agency partners and our partners in the private sector to try to strike that right balance.

I think that that makes this a work in progress, and we need to continually pay close attention to the training and the skills gaps of our employees. We pay close attention to the employee viewpoint survey to see if our employees feel that they are being supported sufficiently in their training and their opportunities to engage in collaboration. That is a very real concern.

I think for us the first step, though, is to really get a handle on this spending, really understand why we were making the spending, really introduce what Deputy Director Cobert talked about; this idea of creating some sense of understanding of why we needed to take one approach versus another, and create some cost/benefit analysis within the organization.

Chairman CARPER. OK. Ms. Cobert.

Ms. COBERT. I would echo those comments. I also think as we continue to apply a high level, the appropriate level of scrutiny to conferences, being as disciplined in measuring the benefits of conferences as we do the costs can also help us. How can we think about, as you described, the conferences where you really, by being there and interacting with individuals, get tangible benefits that enable individuals to build their skills, to deliver against their mission, to get new ideas for government? And how can you then go back and assess which conferences did not perhaps deliver that same level of benefits? How can you think about when people who do go to the conference come back and share what they have learned with their colleagues?

So I think doing those things can also help give us a clearer sense of the benefits and, therefore, help us make the important tradeoffs about how to wisely spend tax dollars.

Chairman CARPER. Great. Thanks very much. Dr. Coburn.

Senator COBURN. It is well known the guidance that OMB has issued. My question for you, Deputy Director Cobert, is: What are the consequences if an agency does not follow your guidance?

Ms. COBERT. For agencies, the requirements and the guidance are quite clear in terms of what are agencies required to report. I think all the individuals that I have spoken with in agencies take that responsibility extremely seriously. They understand the importance of these issues. They feel the personal responsibility to address them and feel personally responsible in giving their own individual approvals to what is set out in the guidance.

Senator COBURN. So you see over here ones that are over your limit, and in your guidance is a waiver, if I understand it correctly, that they can still have conferences over \$500,000 at the discretion of the head of the agency. Here is a list of conferences that occurred this last year. So basically if they decide the guidance does not apply, they can still do it. Correct?

Ms. COBERT. The Secretary needs to approve that guidance. The Secretary also needs to post the waiver and the approval for that waiver for public scrutiny.

Senator COBURN. Yes. And where is that posted now?

Ms. COBERT. Those are posted on the agency websites.

Senator COBURN. OK. So if we went to the agency's websites, we would see the justification for the Secretary's waiver in each of these.

Ms. COBERT. The 2013 ones will be posted at the end of this month.

Senator COBURN. Well, these were 2013, so what I am asking is: Are they posted now, or they will be posted?

Ms. COBERT. The reporting guidelines, as I understand it, are for the travel spending at the end of this month to report the whole fiscal year.

Senator COBURN. For 2013.

Ms. COBERT. I believe that is correct.

Senator COBURN. All right. You gave some reports on reductions in conference spending, but you did not mention the Department of Agriculture. Do you have any data on that?

Ms. COBERT. We do have information on the Department of Agriculture (USDA). I do not have it here in front of me but can get it for you.

Senator COBURN. Well, I would appreciate that.

I would just note for the record that they had 31 conferences that cost over \$10,000 per person. They had 125 conferences that cost over \$3,000 per person. I have been to a lot of conferences as a physician, and I would say half the time is good and half the time is not. As a matter of fact, the lure of the conference to get you there is that there is entertainment and there is fun besides working at a conference. And I am not critical of that. If you go to a conference as a Federal employee, we want you to benefit for your job there, but also benefit from where you travel. So this is not a criticism of destinations or anything else, but the fact is what we did have—and we are going to hear from the IGs, but, for example, Mr. Tangherlini actually is in his position today because of conference spending. So it is not all one-sided.

I would like to put OMB Memo M-12-12 into the record,<sup>1</sup> if I might.

Chairman CARPER. Without objection.

Senator COBURN. Do you know many conferences in excess of \$500,000 that have occurred since that memo was issued?

Ms. COBERT. There have been a number, but I do not have the specifics.

Senator COBURN. If you can get that for us, if you would.

Ms. COBERT. Absolutely.

Senator COBURN. Thank you.

It is not required under the guidance—and you correct me if I am wrong, Deputy Director Cobert—that the agencies do not have to contact OMB to make this decision, right?

Ms. COBERT. In terms of—

<sup>1</sup>The OMB Memo referenced by Senator Coburn appears in the Appendix on page 201.

Senator COBURN. If they exceed the level, they do not have to contact you.

Ms. COBERT. The approval guidelines in Memorandum 12–12 require approval by the Deputy Secretary if your conference is greater than \$100,000 and by the Secretary if your conference is greater than \$500,000.

Senator COBURN. Yes, but they do not have to notify OMB they are doing that?

Ms. COBERT. They do not.

Senator COBURN. So for us to find that out in the future, for you to find that out as the Deputy Director for Management, what is the mechanism that you will use? Scour the websites?

Ms. COBERT. The mechanism that we use is when that reporting is available on the websites, that is how we go through it. We are expecting them—and we have had conversations in our dialogue with them about what we expect, the guidelines they have put in place, in particular for how they think about managing spending. So the discussions we have with them are what are the processes and procedures they have put in place in order to come to those provisions.

Senator COBURN. Do you think there is any need for legislation to make what you have put into guidelines law?

Ms. COBERT. We are very pleased at the progress we have had with the guidelines we have put in place. We have seen reductions in 2012. We see continued further reductions in 2013.

What encourages me also is that we have seen real changes in practices at different agencies, across agencies, in terms of the level of scrutiny that they are using, in terms of the decision criteria, in terms of the availabilities like those that Administrator Tangherlini has provided to help them manage their spending well.

So we continue to see progress, and we are very heartened by that. We think that the administrative rulings we have put in place will drive those changes in behavior over the long term and also provide enough flexibility to, in fact, make sure that guidelines that are put in place are both neither too stringent, but also not too lenient. As the opportunities arrive to continue, for example, to use technology in places where they are a good substitute for people being a person; that is not always the case, but if you can do that more often. We also want to have guidelines that continue to evolve and put appropriate pressure on people to think carefully about their spend. That is why we have approached it this way.

Senator COBURN. So what happens when we quit concentrating on this? Right now we have our thumb on the button. It is in the news. It has been. I have been looking at it for 5 years. What happens when we quit looking at it?

Ms. COBERT. I believe the processes that we have put in place in terms of transparency around posting conferences publicly on the website, the requirements that were in the continuing resolution (CR) around ongoing oversight and information provided to the IGs will help us maintain the kind of focus that has been put on this issue, that is important to continue to put on this issue. We support a focus on continuing to manage this spending closely.

Senator COBURN. All right. In 10 years, Mr. Tangherlini, with a new Administration, a new GSA Administrator, provided you are

not still there, is there currently any provision of law that would prevent GSA from having another big blowout conference costing millions of dollars?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. The provisions of law would be related to appropriations laws, restrictions you heard in the CR, whether they continue, I do not know what will happen 10 years from now. But we have had some Executive Order (EO), changes to the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) or the clarification of Federal Travel Regulations, all things that would need to actively be rescinded, repealed, or changed in order for us to go back to the environment in which we were operating in when we had the unfortunate events that we had.

Senator COBURN. In his prepared testimony for the second panel in this hearing, Inspector General George states that the IRS does not have a system to track and report the actual cost of conferences. I understand that when things were changing in GSA, one of the things that came to light was you did not have a system in place, but you do now.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. We did not before simply because the way the financial systems were designed, we were tracking travel, we were tracking contract expenditures. You put those together, and you begin to start funding a conference. We now have a system to do that.

Senator COBURN. So that tool that you have now, is that transferable?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Absolutely.

Senator COBURN. So that is something they could get without cost from you all?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. There may be some costs associated with setup, purchasing licenses. It is a commercially off-the-shelf technology that we use.

Senator COBURN. But it is not a hard ask?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. No.

Senator COBURN. OK. One final question, then I will yield back. The Department of Justice Inspector General report this year highlighted the travel system method of the Department that DOJ pays more than \$30 per flight booked to a contractor when they use a live travel agent. But they still pay \$7 to book a flight when they do not use a live travel agent. When I book a flight, I do not pay anything. And neither does the rest of America when they book it directly. What is up with that? Why does a Federal employee because they book a flight have to pay 7 bucks if they book it themselves or 30 bucks if they book it through a travel agent? And why are we using travel agents instead of booking a flight?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Well, there may be specific instances where the travel is very complicated. There may be certain requirements. I will not get into the specifics of why someone might use a travel agent. I can tell you that GSA and in our most recent travel system negotiation have been trying to push down the cost of travel in general as well as dramatically increase the use of technology so it feels more like that experience you have when you are traveling on your own, when you have your personal travel experience. That way we can maximize competition, we can give agencies exposure to currently available fares, but still also preserve something that

we benefit tremendously through our negotiated fares, and that is, the ability to, at no cost to the traveler, cancel or rearrange flights, which is actually a major source of revenue to the airlines right now. So that flexibility saves us a lot of money.

Senator COBURN. But, for example, there is not a Kayak for Federal travel?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. We are moving toward, in our Enhanced Travel System 2 (ETS2), the contracts that we just signed, we have just made it through the protest phase with that, and we have resolved the issues. We are actually going to be dramatically upgrading the technology that Federal agencies will use in being able to get online and book travel.

Senator COBURN. So there will still be a charge, though? If I as a Federal employee go and use that, I am still going to pay 7 bucks for—

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I do not know what the cost is, but overall our travel expenses are much less than what is available to the general public because we do aggregate this spend and that is one of those areas where we really do have a very aggressive strategically sourced relationship with the people who provide the services to us.

Senator COBURN. Thank you.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Thanks so much.

Next in questioning, I think, in terms of arrival is Senator Johnson, Senator Tester, Senator Heitkamp. So, Senator Johnson, you are on.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHNSON

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would kind of like to pick up where Senator Coburn left off here. I think it is obvious the reason that we are making any progress is because of the sunshine, the fact that these were some pretty egregious examples and the public found out about it. Also, Deputy Director Cobert, coming from the private sector, you understand the value of information, so start going down the table—Mr. Tangherlini, you talked about the tools that GSA has been developing. Any other agencies using those tools?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I am not sure whether other agencies are using precisely what we are. I do know agencies have dramatically increased the amount of tracking they are doing around conferencing, in part to respond to the requirements for reporting associated with the various OMB memoranda as well as the changes in the Federal Travel Regulations.

Senator JOHNSON. So, Ms. Cobert, how can we—if we have some good tools in one agency, how can we pretty well force other agencies to use those tools that work?

Ms. COBERT. One of the roles that we play at OMB is to try and share these practices and best practices. For example, through discussions at the Chief Financial Officers Council (CFOC), for example, we have talked about the savings in some of these tools. We encourage dialogue between individual agencies, that they develop tracking mechanisms and the like. Some of the tools that Administrator Tangherlini mentioned about, for example, the availability of Federal conference space are shared across agencies.

So for us, one of the key purposes is to sustain this dialogue and help work with individual agencies and help encourage the bilateral conversations to make that happen.

Senator JOHNSON. "Talk," "encourage." What about management actually directing people to use something that works so we save taxpayer money? Is there any action on, this thing works, this is best practice we are seeing in this agency, let us use it in the other agencies? Is there action to do that?

Ms. COBERT. In travel and in other commodities, for example, that is what we are doing through the Strategic Sourcing Council in putting those mechanisms in place, getting not just the forcing but also the transparency so people understand the benefits they get from moving to these mechanisms, and that is the work of that council going forward.

Senator JOHNSON. So we are publishing these conferences that exceed half a million dollars on individual agency websites, correct?

Ms. COBERT. Yes, greater than \$100,000.

Senator JOHNSON. Excuse me, \$100,000. Is there a better way to highlight that? Should we accumulate all that and put that out there on an annual report and maybe through the Committee? Would that be more effective to—rather than have it kind of—I would not say "hidden," but certainly diffuse. How about accumulate all that information, publish one report, have the Administration highlight it, have Congress highlight it so that all the agencies understand that if they are going to spend more than \$100,000, Americans are going to understand that?

Ms. COBERT. Sure. When we put in place the Executive Order, we concurred that transparency was important. That was a key element of the order, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with you and others to think about the best way to ensure that there is real visibility of that information. And so we would be happy to have a dialogue on approaches to do that.

Senator JOHNSON. OK. I would suggest that. Certainly in the private sector, if I needed to make sure there was greater efficiency in a particular department, we did it with their budget. I mean, we forced efficiency. Are we doing that within the agencies? In other words, a really good way to make sure they tighten up their travel and their conference spending is not give them as much money.

Ms. COBERT. The guidance in the Executive Order was a 30-percent reduction in administrative spend. We have seen agencies take that and achieve against that level. We have seen spending come down in fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2013, and so we think they all feel that pressure and are working within their budgets to manage that appropriately.

The needs for travel are different from one agency to the next, but we have seen a consistent reduction across agencies in their spend on these topics.

Senator JOHNSON. It was one of the questions I had because I saw the goals of reducing administrative costs by 20 percent, then conference spending by 30 percent. And I got some numbers, but I did not get details about the starting point and the ending point, and the actual percent, the dollar amount—do you have that information?

Ms. COBERT. I can give you the numbers for travel spending, and we would be happy to provide you post this hearing more of the detail that is available.

Senator JOHNSON. Are you, coming from the private sector, as frustrated as I am in terms of the lack of good, solid, basic financial information to be able to make these decisions in order to drive these types of performance improvements?

Ms. COBERT. Getting the kind of data both on actual cost, cost per unit, is something we are continuing to work toward. Travel spending, of the things I have looked at, actually is a place where it is tracked reasonably clearly, so we can track, for example, that the spending on travel in 2010 was at \$17 billion, and the drop that has occurred. So this is a place where there actually is relatively better transparency.

Senator JOHNSON. How much more information do you need, though? I mean, on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of information available to you as a manager trying to tighten up budgets, trying to tighten up these policies, how good is the information you have within these agencies?

Ms. COBERT. It varies by agency. I do not have that detail yet.

Senator JOHNSON. So which are the bad agencies? Which are the ones that really need the most improvement that just do not have the information—that are not following best practices?

Ms. COBERT. Senator, I have not been able to go through this agency by agency in the time that I have been here yet, but we are continuing to work on that. I know the shared services—strategic sourcing arranged our places where we are trying to get that information out there and increase that visibility.

Senator JOHNSON. OK. What else can force action? Mr. Tangherlini, just what else can really drive this process? As Senator Coburn said, when we are not looking at this, if the public turns attention off it, if we do not have another Star Wars video or Star Trek video, what is going to continue to force action?

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I think you have really put your finger right on it. It really is transparency, and it is clear financial management. I think at some level you cannot legislate common sense; you cannot require common sense. You just have to apply common sense in managing these organizations. And I think, we had to have a real solid dose of it. We have now. We set a budget last year that was less than a third what we had spent in fiscal year 2015, and we made it our goal to come under that budget. We did. We are taking the savings, and we are putting it back into our critical mission, which is providing the facilities, the acquisition, and the technology that allow agencies to save money and deliver their mission.

So I think we have to make sure we do create, while we have the opportunity, the systems and structures that allow people to apply good managerial judgment and common sense and make sure we get the outcomes we need.

Senator JOHNSON. Then just one quick final question, because I agree, there can be some real value in these conferences. The social interaction, the person-to-person contact can be highly valuable. So my last question for you, Director Cobert. Are you hearing complaints from agencies where our drive to create efficiencies is actu-

ally doing damage, where we may be tightening down too much? Has there been a downside?

Ms. COBERT. I think the restrictions we have put into place have forced some very tough conversations about whether they are able to have the kind of in-person interactions they need, whether, for example, restrictions on the number of people going, in an appropriate effort to manage the budget, is perhaps creating challenges for perhaps the more junior individuals who do not get that chance to interact. But I think those are the right conversations for agencies to be having. It is the right conversation to be thinking about who should attend, how do we share knowledge better, how can we substitute in other ways.

For example, when faced with restrictions on travel, the National Institute of Health (NIH) started holding some of their peer reviews via videoconference. That saved them money, but it also in some cases enabled them to get access to individuals that otherwise would have been tough to reach.

So I think we are having the right conversations. I think the issue you raise is an important risk that we have to watch carefully. But I think today the right conversations are taking place and good decisions are being made.

Senator JOHNSON. OK. Well, again, thank you for your testimony and your efforts. We really are making some solid progress here. It is really good to see it. We want to make sure it continues. So thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CARPER. Thanks so much.

I understand that Senator Tester has yielded to Senator Heitkamp, so Senator Heitkamp, Senator Tester, and we welcome also Senator Pryor.

Senator HEITKAMP. Mr. Chairman, I do not know what that is going to cost me eventually, but—

Senator TESTER. A bunch. [Laughter.]

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HEITKAMP**

Senator HEITKAMP. I think it might be dearly.

Just a couple quick points, because I only have a limited amount of time. I think way too often on conference evaluation, you look at the travel and you look at the hotel and you look at all of that, you do not count the opportunity cost to that employee. And I am very curious about whether the Administration, or whether you as efficiency experts, have looked at these conferences from the standpoint of the opportunity cost to the employee. If the employee is traveling, obviously sitting in the chair now for 2 days at a conference, comes back, he or she obviously is not doing what they typically would be doing, but yet we never talk about that. And I am curious about whether in either agency you have begun a discussion about that as part of the evaluation of the necessity of the conference.

Ms. COBERT. The issue you raise about opportunity costs is an important one, and I think the discussion starts with asking whether the conference itself will advance that individual's work and mission. So how can the conference directly impact the work

that they are trying to do? It might be different work that they are doing at their desk, but how can they do that?

I think the other piece that folks have looked at in doing this is thinking about not just the time that they are at the conference, but the travel to the conference. As someone who spent a great deal of her former life on an airplane, I think we can all attest to the fact that it is hard to be as productive sitting on a plane than it is sitting at your desk. And so what we have seen agencies do is think more carefully about planning of conferences. Can they have things back to back so you lose less time in travel? Can you do things in a way so you cut out an additional trip? Can you think about the timing of the start and end so you get people so they do not have to stay that extra night, they get back that night and get back to their desk in the morning? So those things I think help as well.

Senator HEITKAMP. I think what I am really asking, is there a systematic way, the same way you would evaluate other costs, that you include the cost of the employee's time in your evaluation as a matter of routine? Is that something you do right now?

Ms. COBERT. I am not sure how agencies specifically do it. To me, the challenge in doing that is I want to start with the assumption that when the employee is at the conference, they are doing their work, just a different aspect of their work. Otherwise, they should not be at the conference, right? So I think how do you think about that tradeoff.

Senator HEITKAMP. But in terms of evaluating the cost of the training, I mean, I am not saying—I guess I put you off on the wrong track when I talked about opportunity costs. But I am talking about the fact that these conferences cost more than travel and hotels and meals. They cost time. And time is probably the most expensive piece of this.

And so understand that that is an investment taxpayers make in that conference, and so we have to evaluate the total cost in order to completely understand the value that we are getting. And I just raise that question and would be curious about followup because I do not have a whole lot of time here. I share Dr. Coburn's concern about backsliding. If you do not have a true cultural change, if you do not have a true visceral kind of, "No, we are not going to do that unless it is absolutely essential," then you need a bigger hammer than an Executive Order, or a bigger hammer than an IG report that may get finalized 2 years after you have left your executive position.

And so, I mean, I am curious about a response to whether you would support legislation that would reinforce the work that you have done already in your administrative positions. And that is for either one of you.

Ms. COBERT. We believe that we are succeeding in making the cultural change that you require. When you see the reductions in costs, in some cases of over 50, 60, the 80 percent that Administrator Tangherlini talked about, that comes—and we have seen the way that there are new guidelines to think about costs, including, I think, your idea about how you think about opportunity costs is an important element. We think those elements are driving the cultural change we need, and we think we continue to make progress,

and we believe that the actions we have taken will be sustained. These orders would need to be rescinded. We think we have put in place something that can last beyond the current times.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I think efforts such as our Government Travel Advisory Council in which we have brought agencies and many layers of government, State, local, Federal, as well as private sector providers of these services, allow us then to feed back into things like the Federal Travel Regulations, which have for agencies the force and effect of law, to have more flexible kind of ability to respond to maybe the evolving nature of what conferences and travel look like.

I think, as we have certainly during my tenure—and I know through my conversations with Deputy Director Cobert—we are very interested and committed to working with this Committee so that we leave a better institution than either of us found when we came here, because that is our commitment.

Senator HEITKAMP. My final question is there is always an assumption in what we say that it is better to be in the room with people. But yet, there does not seem to be a lot of science behind that; it is just our kind of, what we believe as human beings, that you and I can accomplish more face-to-face than we could teleconferencing. But I am not sure that that is true, and I think your point that some people can be in the room that otherwise could not be in the room so the experience may be more valuable. I would be curious about any followup that you would have in terms of studies that have been done about the relative merits of both ways of interacting. Because if we took all this money that I think was wasted on conferences and invested it in technology, think about how much further we would be ahead. I mean, we might even be able to put this kind of technology in very small places and be able to manage it.

And so I am curious and would appreciate any followup that you have or any studies that you know of that do, in fact, analyze the two experiences.

Ms. COBERT. I think the issue you are raising is a very important one, and I think that is one where we will continue to monitor the research. I do believe from my personal experience that this has continued to evolve. Videoconferencing, for example, is so much more effective today and easy to accomplish at small cost. It used to be highly expensive to install a special videoconference room, and so the cost effectiveness versus travel did not work. But today, when you can use your phone, your tablet, your laptop to do videoconferencing, it is actually quite inexpensive and increasingly reliable.

So I think those studies are still emerging. One of our roles is to continue to look at that. It is the issue I raised at the beginning about measuring effectiveness. It can be more effective for some things than others because you get more people there, you are not spending time traveling to and fro. So the issues about how we take advantage of the changes in technology is something that is at the forefront of our attention, and we will be happy to work with you as we learn more about effectiveness and try and see what studies are being done to apply those in the Federal Government.

Senator HEITKAMP. And I just want to thank Senator Tester.

Chairman CARPER. We want to thank you for some good questions. Senator Tester, thank you so much.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR TESTER

Senator TESTER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank both the panelists for being here today.

Look, I think we all can agree that with conferences there are some benefits both to the person who attends and to the business that puts them on. I think that the examples that the Ranking Member gave are examples of abuses in the system. He also handed out a sheet—I believe it was from Dr. Coburn—that talked about the DOJ conference in Moscow and an Education conference and a VA conference in sunny Detroit. And whether you are talking about that, Anaheim, Las Vegas, or Big Sky in Montana, those are all places—well, maybe with one exception—that people want to go to.

The question becomes, though, in your testimony—first of all, let us take the International Drug Enforcement Conference, and I am sitting here at this dais. I have no clue if it could be done by teleconference. But it seems to me it could be. You are talking about international; you probably cannot send everybody you want to send there. Does OMB have any recommendations on teleconferencing? Have they been able to put out any rock solid recommendations? And if you have not, that is fine. Just let me know.

Ms. COBERT. We have talked about how people can use different kinds of technologies, both teleconferencing and videoconferencing, but we do not have any formal guidance or recommendations.

Senator TESTER. OK. Do you anticipate there will be guidance on teleconferencing coming forward? I mean, take a look at education. We are talking about using tele-education all over the place. And I see there is merit. I believe there is merit of people looking one-on-one. But maybe not every year, or certainly not every quarter. So do you anticipate that coming out with a format of when they should probably use it and when they should not? Or what kind of metrics are you going to use?

Ms. COBERT. The overall approach has been to encourage the use of those things and support the use of those things. We have not given specific guidance partly because it continues to evolve so rapidly.

Senator TESTER. All right. I got you. Yes, OK. We are talking about conferences, and then we are talking about travel. I want to go to your written testimony, Beth, and I will brief it up, but the Department of Treasury achieved \$181 million in travel savings; EPA, travel spending reduced by \$35 million; Interior achieved \$99 million in travel savings; Department of Labor, \$29 million in travel savings; Department of Defense reduced spending on hosting conferences. There are five examples. Four of them are different than the fifth. The fifth one talks about conferences. The top four talk about conferences and travel. Are you able to split the conferences out from the travel in these different agencies?

Ms. COBERT. This is the issue that Administrator Tangherlini talked about earlier.

Senator TESTER. That is fine.

Ms. COBERT. The travel codes, Code 21, and that is an explicit code—

Senator TESTER. Yes.

Ms. COBERT. Much of the conference spending is coded into either contracting or other fields, so it is difficult still to track completely to the extent everyone would like conference expenditures—

Senator TESTER. Do you think—

Ms. COBERT [continuing]. Track it for individual conferences because we have to accumulate them to get to the \$100,000.

Senator TESTER. I think there is a huge difference, though, between conferences and travel. A huge difference. Do you think it is—I mean, I can tell you right now, you save 99—I should not say “you.” The Department of Interior saved \$99 million in travel savings, and in a day where we do not have earmarks, I depend on those agencies to get out to see those projects so that they can make recommendations through the Administration on how to spend money, because we do not do it as a Legislative Branch anymore, which is a mistake.

So the question is: When they reduce travel, they cannot get out to States like Montana that cost a bunch of money to get there? And so that becomes a problem.

Now, we want to save money on travel, but the fact is that sometimes we are saving money, and it is costing us government efficiency in that savings. Is there any way to break that out, or is there going to be any recommendations on breaking that out?

Ms. COBERT. We are continuing to work with agencies to improve the procedures they have to track conference spending specifically, including, for example, the tools that Administrator Tangherlini talked about earlier.

Senator TESTER. OK. When do you anticipate those recommendations coming out? Because I think they are pretty important. I will give you an example. Here is another one. Are you about to—because the Ranking Member brought up USDA. Are conferences that are held to inform farmers on farm program benefits considered conferences?

Ms. COBERT. They do meet the definition of a conference.

Senator TESTER. OK. So we are talking—we are sitting here—and I appreciate you bringing it up because it clicked in my mind. We are sitting here, it costs \$3,000 to send one employee to a conference where there are 150 farmers sitting there. That is considered a conference, and it looks to us like its spending is out of control, but on the other hand, it is the agency doing their job, telling folks what we have passed here in Congress. Is that a fair assessment?

Ms. COBERT. We do think that the reason why we believe we have issued guidance with flexibilities for agencies is to take account of the factors like you are describing, that these things serve different purposes. Some conferences involve just Federal employees. Some involve members of the public and the community that those Federal employees are trying to interact with.

Senator TESTER. But they are not split out. They are not split out right now. The conference I think about is the folks going to Las Vegas and what you talked about, where all these agency folks are

there. The other conference I am talking about is a conference where one or two Federal employees go, and they are giving information out. It is a conference setting. Are they split out?

Ms. COBERT. In the disclosure about the conferences, the purpose of the conference is disclosed. So why it is being held and the kind of people that are attending.

Senator TESTER. OK. Hopefully we were able to drill down on that.

I want to talk about conference spending overall. You talked about it, Dan, a little bit, that we were kind of building to 2010. I got to tell you, I do not remember this being an issue in the 1960s, 1970s, maybe even in the 1980s. Are you guys able to go back—maybe it is not the GSA; maybe it is somebody else—and determine what has gone on here over the years and how it was handled in the past? If it was not an issue, say, in the 1970s, how did they inform their folks? Because that information transfer is important. Go ahead.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Well, when I started in Federal service in the 1990s, I do not remember it being as prevalent an issue either, so that was one of my issues of curiosity when I got to GSA. When did this become such an important part of the way we approached our work? And I would have to say that the data, the quality of the data begins to degrade as you get into the early 2000s. And as Deputy Director Cobert pointed out, we do not classify conference versus travel, and so we are looking at travel as a proxy.

Senator TESTER. Got you.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. Because in order to go to a conference, you had to travel generally.

So what we saw was that travel was building across the organization, but that was for the entire period of the 2000s. 2010 was for GSA one of the higher years, but it was not the spike. We had just seen an increase over time. And so what we realized is that we had to start asking ourselves some fundamental questions about the way we deliver our mission and whether we should ask some questions about—assuming whether you should go to this trip or not or whether you needed to take that training by going somewhere or whether you could do it online.

Senator TESTER. OK. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to have this conversation. I think that we have to be careful. I think we look at top-line numbers here, and I think it is important we look at top-line numbers. But I think we also need to look at some government efficiency, because there are some out there that want to reduce government to the point where it does not work and then complain that government does not work.

There are others out there that want to make sure that their agencies are lean and mean, and we do not have conferences where you have magicians and clowns and everything else.

I do not see how we do this without splitting travel out from conferences. I just do not. I think it is too easy to sit there and pound one agency because they had an exorbitant conference at the expense of all the other agencies that are doing their travel right. And so I just think we take a look at it. There is no excuse for spending the kind of money we are spending on extravagant conferences, but on the other side of the coin, travel is pretty damn

important for these agencies. And it is very important for me as a Senator from Montana representing folks out there to make sure the Executive Branch is able to do the job that they are telling people that they can do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CARPER. Those are great points.

I just want to share some commonsense things that I am aware of in the last couple of days, that we have in my own family found ways to reduce travel costs. Our youngest son, Ben, was going to join me at an event, and he could have flown out of Philadelphia International or he could have flown out of Baltimore Washington International (BWI). And he did some checking and found out he could cut his price in half. He paid for it himself, but he could save 50 percent.

Last night I could have gone back to speak to the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce on a train, caught it at 6 o'clock as opposed to 6:05. At 6 o'clock the Acela costs twice as much. I took the 6:05.

We find that if we want to book an airline flight, particularly if it is a conference or it is a meeting that is scheduled weeks or months in advance, the sooner you book it, as you know, the lower the price. And the same is true for trains. There are all kinds of common-sense things we can do.

To Dr. Coburn's question, and, frankly, raised by others, of when the cameras are turned off, when the spotlight is off, how do we make sure that agencies do not backslide, and a big part of it is transparency. Sunshine is the best disinfectant. And we have a 24/7 media. They are looking for stuff to report on, and they like to do "gotcha" when it serves—and it is good that they do, especially when it serves a positive effect for the taxpayers and makes sure we get some better results for less money.

One of the questions I have is: What further can we do on the legislative side that would actually bolster the efforts of the Administration, the very positive effects that we have seen? And when you are thinking about this, if you can give us some ideas now, that would be good. And I am also going to ask you to think about this beyond this hearing. If we are to consider some legislation, what could we do that would actually further ensure that progress has been made, continues, and maybe some progress that has not been begins? Please, Ms. Cobert.

Ms. COBERT. Well, thank you for those comments, and I think one of the things that we can continue to benefit from is discussions like this one. Your continuing us to hold us responsible for the decisions that the Administration is making is important, and having a dialogue on this is something that we welcome.

We believe we have made progress with the Executive Orders. We believe we are continuing to make progress and refine those and have those work better. And so I would like to take advantage of your comment and opportunity to come back, because I think we are learning. We have learned a lot of lessons from the experiences and success we have had, but we know we can and need to do more, and we want to continue down that path in partnership with you.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Thank you.

Mr. Tangherlini, same question.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. I appreciate the opportunity that that question represents. As an agency that provides a variety of different travel-related services to other agencies, such as the ETS system which agencies, most agencies use to book travel, a FedRooms program in which we have tried to aggregate the spend demand of agencies so that we can go and negotiate better prices with hotels, it is a great opportunity for us to work very closely with OMB so that the Administration can have a common response to your question.

Chairman CARPER. All right. And my last question—we welcome Senator Ayotte, and I have one last question, and then I am going to yield to you, Senator. I mentioned earlier that we had received a number of letters. I asked unanimous consent that those letters be made a part of the record, and they have been. One of the concerns raised in one of the letters was from our Majority Leader, and his letter to the Committee was about the informal blacklisting of specific locations because of the perception as resort locations. And to quote Senator Reid, I think he said—I think this is a quote. It says: “Any decisions about government conferences or meetings should focus on providing the best value to the American taxpayers.” I think that is—hard to argue with.

I agree with him. In my opinion, if it makes sense financially to hold a meeting or a conference in a particular location, an agency should hold the meeting there. The fact that the location is someplace that people want to travel to should not prevent that location from being selected.

And I would just say, Ms. Cobert, are you aware of any agency directive, either formal or informal, that would prohibit government conferences in resort or vacation destinations?

Ms. COBERT. There is no guidance or regulations prohibiting conferences in resort-type locations. As you have indicated, we think the decision criteria, if you need to hold a conference, for where to hold that conference should be based on a number of factors. It should be based on cost, both the cost of the conference and the travel, the total cost of the conference. It should also be based upon effectiveness. Who are you trying to reach and what is the appropriate location?

And so those are the guidelines that we want agencies to use in making these decisions, and we believe in doing so they should consider the range of places that could meet those needs at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer and providing the most effective venue.

Chairman CARPER. OK, thanks. Thanks so much.

Senator Ayotte, welcome. Glad to see you.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AYOTTE**

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you. I want to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for this important hearing.

I wanted to followup, Ms. Cobert, just to ask you—I very much appreciate the guidelines that OMB has put in place and the progress we have seen in really coming down on wasteful spending with regard to government conferences and how our taxpayers dollars are being spent. One thing that, as I look at this, I am a co-sponsor of Senator Coburn’s legislation. How do we ensure that we have a permanent change in this culture of responsibility? Because

as I look at it, it took us awhile to get here, and we have not—in looking back at 2012, that is relatively recent, and then we can have a change of Administration where the emphasis would not be there or a change in your agency, and that happens quite frequently. And so I guess the question would be: How do we ensure permanent change in the culture?

Ms. COBERT. I think the question you are raising about a permanent change in culture is a very important one, and we believe we are making strides, important strides, in that direction.

I am particularly encouraged by the reduction in spending in 2013 that has continued to exceed the savings that we achieved in 2012 and the decisionmaking and discipline that are being put into place in different agencies to sustain that kind of progress.

I think the other elements that are helping us are the requirements that have been put in place around transparency so that spending, particularly on large conferences, is visible and needs to be justified and visible to the American public. I think as agencies have tried to implement the guidance, they have also been putting in place new tools and processes for approvals and decisionmaking and scrutiny that I think will be sustained, just as the Executive Order will remain in place unless someone makes an explicit action to rescind it.

Senator AYOTTE. One of the things that I think—obviously what brought us to this position where the guidelines were issued, there were a number of Treasury IG reports that were appalling. We have all seen the attention brought to some of the really outrageous events—foremost, of course, we saw with some of the events in the hot tub and all those issues.

So one thing I worry about is that if this is just in guidelines and we do not do something permanent in terms of legislation, that this goes on the back burner again. And the things that you are trying to accomplish just become, OK, we have done it because everyone is paying attention to it right this moment, but there is no permanent shift there.

So I understand what you are saying, but how do we make sure that this does not go on the back burner again on behalf of ensuring that when travel is done, it is done obviously that people are enhancing their productivity on behalf of the American taxpayer?

Ms. COBERT. From the Administration's perspective, we are completely committed to continuing the discipline that we have put in place and that we need to continue to reinforce and, in fact, extend. We think transparency helps us there. In the continuing resolution, for example, there is also ongoing reporting to the IGs, and we are anxious to continue cooperating and working with the IG community and their important oversight role in this area, to continue to apply the scrutiny that we need for these kinds of events.

So I think the changes in processes, the transparency, collaboration with the IG community are all parts of ensuring that the progress we have made is sustained.

Senator AYOTTE. I certainly appreciate the OMB guidelines. Do you think they are sufficient?

Ms. COBERT. We have seen significant reductions in spend. We are pleased to see that. We also want to be mindful that things change. As we have talked about today, the opportunities to use al-

ternatives like videoconference have expanded dramatically, even in the last couple of years. As those capabilities continue to expand, we think it is important to revisit the guidance and make sure that it is, in fact, putting sufficient pressure on agency behavior, but also not so much pressure that it prevents them from doing mission-critical things that do involve physical movement, physical collocation.

So we will continue to evaluate and assess how do we put the appropriate level of scrutiny and guidance to make sure that taxpayers dollars are being spent wisely.

Senator AYOTTE. So this is something that obviously requires constant re-evaluation, and then I think the discussion for us here is: Is there any legislative backdrop that we need to ensure that there is a permanent culture change that this Committee would take up?

And then I think another important question is: How do we measure the value of conferences; in other words, the value that an employee is receiving and also the value that, of course, within their role within the government makes them more productive on behalf of the taxpayer?

Ms. COBERT. The issue about measuring the benefits of conferences is an important one, and one where we can continue to have greater discipline. If we send individuals to a scientific conference, what new ideas do they bring back? If we send individuals to in-person training, how do we judge the effectiveness of that training versus doing it online?

So I think there are ways we can and need to continue to enhance measurement. If we send individuals to a conference to have outreach to the public, how do we make sure those messages are getting through? And I think we can continue to work on being more disciplined about having the right kind of metrics for the different kinds of conferences and reasons that we are bringing together. And we are anxious to work with this Committee and others on finding good ways to measure that.

Senator AYOTTE. Can you give me a sense of how much that is happening now? In other words, when there is a decision to have a conference, is there, "Here are our goals up front, what we hope people will accomplish"? How much followup afterwards is happening in terms of what did you receive of value, how has that translated toward making your agency in a better, stronger, more productive position? I do not have a sense of how much that actually happens.

Ms. COBERT. Because of the restrictions that have been put on dollars, we see agencies starting to put those procedures into place in terms of starting at the beginning to justify the conference. Why are they having it? Who should attend? How do they think about sharing the information that comes back?

And so the decisionmaking, the tough decisionmaking that the guidelines have imposed have actually improved that process in agencies. We are happy to share some of the ways people think about that, but that is an explicit part of the decision process. I do not know if you have some specifics you can talk to, Dan.

Mr. TANGHERLINI. It really depends on the conference. But in many cases, particularly conferences that we in the past have led,

we do actually have participant surveys in which we ask participants whether they felt that this provided value, rate the quality of, say, the training experience. And we have used that in the past to—we have used that as we have discussed the possibility of continuing that activity or restarting that activity. In most cases it is the latter because GSA has really stopped offering much in the way of conferences, and we are asking ourselves the questions: Have we lost some opportunity for good training, good interaction? And so we are going back to those participant surveys and seeing if there is some value there that we have lost.

Senator AYOTTE. I know that my time has expired. It seems to me that I see the value in a participant survey, but I think that we need to go beyond that in terms of measuring what the participants are receiving in terms of how it translates to what they do in the agency. And that requires an objective view, I think with not only taking feedback from the participants, but also looking at it from the leadership within the management, of looking at it objectively toward how do we translate this into the job roles and making our workers more prepared and better able to serve.

So I hope that we can go beyond that, and I look forward to—I think this is a very important issue for the Committee to address, and I certainly appreciate the hearing today, and I want to thank Senator Coburn for his legislation on this.

Chairman CARPER. All right. We are going to excuse you here in just a moment. I want to just go back to something that Senator Ayotte just mentioned, and that is culture. I have been on this Committee now for 13 years. Dr. Coburn has been on here almost that long. And one of the things we have sought to do is to help by working with OMB, working with GAO and Inspectors General, GSA and others, private groups, is to affect as best we can, whether it is the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch, nonprofits, to start—it is like—I describe it as changing the course of an aircraft carrier. In the Navy, doing something hard, we always likened it to changing the course of an aircraft carrier. Or changing an aircraft engine when you are in flight, that is really hard. And this is hard to change the culture of something as big as the Federal Government. It does not mean you do not try.

And part of our responsibility here in this Committee for a long time has been to really try and try again. I think we are blessed right now with good partners in the Executive Branch, and I am very much encouraged by what is being reported here today. Obviously we can do better, and we want to do better. And one of the questions that you are going to be thinking about and coming back to us on is a point that you have made and Dr. Coburn and others have made: Is there something more that we could be doing legislatively that would be really constructive, positive, and productive? My hope is that there will be, and if there is, we can work on something on a bipartisan basis.

Thank you very much. It is just a pleasure considering that your nominations came before us not that long ago, not that many months ago, and you had a chance, Mr. Tangherlini, for a number of—actually, a year and a half or so now to serve on an acting basis, now on a confirmed basis, to see the work that you are doing, the leadership that you are providing. I am reminded again how

important it is to have confirmed leadership, Senate-confirmed leadership in place in these important jobs, and you are a strong reminder of that to us today.

When you get any of our questions, please respond to them. Thank you very much for your leadership, your stewardship, and your presence here today. Thank you. [Pause.]

I am going to ask the Committee to come back into order, please. We are pleased to welcome our second panel of witnesses made up of three Inspectors General, and some of you have been before us before, and we welcome you back. I am just going to give a real brief introduction, and we will turn to you to make your statements.

Our first witness on this panel is Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz, who was sworn in as the fourth confirmed Inspector General for the Department of Justice, a little less than 2 years ago, I think, April 16, 2012. As Inspector General, Mr. Horowitz oversees a nationwide workforce of approximately 450 special agents, auditors, inspectors, attorneys, and support staff whose mission is to detect and to deter waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct in the Department of Justice programs and to promote economy and efficiency in Department operations. Prior to being confirmed as Inspector General, Mr. Horowitz was a partner in Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft and also served for many years as an attorney at the Department of Justice. We thank you very much for joining us and for your service today.

Next, we have Inspector General of the U.S. General Services Administration, Brian D. Miller. Mr. Miller was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 22, 2005, so it has been 8 years. As Inspector General, Mr. Miller leads special agents, lawyers, and support staff in conducting nationwide audits and investigations. His office's work on GSA's 2010 Western Regions Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, has had a ripple effect on travel and conference spending across our Federal Government and is one of the main reasons we are here today, and we thank you for that. Prior to becoming Inspector General at GSA, Mr. Miller worked for the U.S. Department of Justice for 15 years. Thanks again for your work and your presence today.

Our third witness is J. Russell George, who has served as Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration since November 2004, almost a decade. Prior to assuming this role, Mr. George served as the Inspector General of the Corporation for National and Community Services for several years. In addition to his duties as the Inspector General for Tax Administration, Mr. George serves as a member of the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board and a member of the Integrity Committee of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE). I think that makes you twice a citizen. But Mr. George began his career as a prosecutor in Queens and later served as staff director and chief counsel for the Government Management Information and Technology Subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives. Mr. George, great to see you, and thank you for joining us today.

We all look forward to your testimonies, and your entire statements will be made part of the record. Feel free to summarize as you wish, and try to keep within about 7 minutes, and then we

have our caucus luncheons before too long, so we would like to get to them before they are over. So thank you again for your good work and for your testimonies today.

Mr. Horowitz, do you want to lead us off?

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. MICHAEL E. HOROWITZ,<sup>1</sup>  
INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

Mr. HOROWITZ. Thank you, Chairman Carper.

Chairman Carper, Dr. Coburn, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify at today's important hearing.

Since 2007, my office has conducted two audits of conference spending by the Department of Justice. In both of those reports, we identified significant concerns regarding conference expenditures and reporting.

In September 2007, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued an audit report examining 10 conferences sponsored by DOJ components between October 2004 and September 2006. We found that Department sponsors did not ensure that conference event planners offered the best value for the fees charged. We further found that expenditures for meals and receptions appeared to be excessive, and that significant service charges were applied to such costs. Further, we identified inconsistent reporting of conference expenditures by components to the Department's leadership, and that the Department did not maintain a single financial reporting system capable of providing the costs of Department conferences.

We made 14 recommendations to the Department. For example, we recommended that the Department implement specific guidance regarding cost comparisons for conference locations and venues; that they develop conference food and beverage policies; and that they evaluate methods for the use of external conference event planners. In response to our recommendations, the Department issued new guidelines on conference planning and reporting.

In a followup audit that we did in September 2011, we reviewed again 10 conferences from the Department that occurred this time between October 2007 and September 2009. We found continued concerns with regard to certain spending on conference event planners. We further found that some Department components did not minimize conference food and beverage costs as required by Federal and Department guidelines. We made 10 recommendations in that report to the Department, including that the Department only use training and technical assistance providers when it was the most cost-effective method available; the components be required to conduct a cost/benefit analysis when considering whether to order food and beverages in order to obtain free meeting space; and that the Department establish food and beverage guidelines for conferences supported by cooperative agreement funds.

Shortly after this audit, OMB issued memoranda addressing conference spending, and in June 2012, the Department released revised policies on conference spending.

Yesterday the Department provided us with a report on conferences it held in fiscal year 2013, and the report showed that the

---

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Horowitz appears in the Appendix on page 57.

Department spent approximately \$23 million last fiscal year on conferences, significantly less than it did in fiscal year 2012.

Now that we have this information, the OIG intends to initiate shortly an audit of selected conferences identified in yesterday's report which will enable us to not only evaluate whether the Department expended funds in an appropriate manner but also to, most importantly, I think, assess the additional controls it implemented in June 2012.

The OIG plays a critical role in ensuring that taxpayer money is spent effectively and efficiently. We will continue to do all we can to oversee conference expenditures by the Department.

I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee may have. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CARPER. Thank you so much.

Inspector General Miller, thank you.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. BRIAN D. MILLER,<sup>1</sup> INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

Mr. MILLER. Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I appreciate the Committee's longstanding interest in oversight as well as its continued support of my office's oversight efforts.

Our reviews of GSA conferences found: contracts signed by individuals without a contracting warrant; contracting officers being brought in after the fact to ratify decisions already taken by event planners rather than in the initial acquisition planning process; the use of outside event planners without a contract with the agency; improperly providing source information to contractors; and other examples of non-compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the General Services Administration's manual.

After our report on the Western Regions Conference, congressional oversight and transparency increased, which led to more accountability and internal controls. For example, GSA has recognized and consolidated its Office of the CFO and the Office of Administrative Services, which implemented tight controls over conference and travel spending. Additionally, GSA introduced an on-line training session on conference attendance that is mandatory for every employee.

In 2013, the Congress required agencies to report conferences costing over \$20,000 to their Offices of Inspectors General within 15 days. Additionally, OMB directed agencies to: one, significantly reduce travel expenses; two, initiate senior-level review and approval of all planned and future conference expenses in excess of \$100,000; three, prohibit expenses in excess of \$500,000 unless an agency head provides a waiver in writing; and, four, publicly report on all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000. The memorandum also directed the Department of Defense, GSA, and OMB to review the Joint Federal Travel Regulations and the Federal Travel Regulation to ensure that policies promote cost savings.

Theoretically, these requirements should discourage further conference abuses. I think a continued focus on transparency in con-

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Miller appears in the Appendix on page 62.

ference spending will help ensure that internal controls and accountability remain. While I am encouraged by the steps GSA has taken, we have not had occasion to review a more recent conference, and accordingly, our assessment, while positive, is only theoretical.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for their continued support of my office, and I welcome any questions that the Committee may have.

Chairman CARPER. Thanks so much, Mr. Miller. Mr. George.

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. J. RUSSELL GEORGE,<sup>1</sup> INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR TAX ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY**

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you, Chairman Carper, Dr. Coburn, Senator Johnson. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss IRS conference spending. Today's testimony highlights the results of our audit of IRS conference spending for fiscal years 2010 through 2012 and updates the IRS' progress implementing our nine recommendations.

Overall, the IRS spent an estimated \$49 million for 225 conferences during the 3-year period. Our primary focus was on an August 2010 management conference held in Anaheim, California. This conference was selected because the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) received an allegation of excessive spending and it was the most expensive conference that they held.

The conference was held at the Marriott, Hilton, and Sheraton hotels in Anaheim in August 2010 at a reported cost of \$4.1 million and for an estimated 2,600 executives and managers.

Some of our key findings for the Anaheim conference include:

The IRS did not have effective controls to track and report the costs of conference;

The IRS used two event planners that were not under contract with the IRS and had no incentive to negotiate a favorable room rate. They were paid an estimated total of \$133,000 in commissions by the hotels, and rather than negotiate for a lower room rate, the planners specifically requested 25 or more very important person (VIP) suite upgrades, complementary drinks, and other refreshments.

Other examples of questionable spending include: planning trips costing \$35,000; two video productions shown at the conference; \$44,000 in travel costs for employees to staff information booths in an exhibition hall; gifts and trinkets given to IRS employees costing \$64,000; and \$135,000 expended for outside speakers.

To its credit, annual conference spending at the IRS dropped from \$38 million in fiscal year 2010 to \$5 million in fiscal year 2012. The IRS attributes the reduction of spending in part to enhanced policies and controls which include Department of the Treasury and Office of Management and Budget guidelines.

I also want to point out that conferences can serve an important function at the IRS. For example, the IRS nationwide Tax Forums offer 3 days of seminars presented by IRS personnel in the fields

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. George appears in the Appendix on page 65.

of tax law, compliance, and ethics. These forums provide training and outreach to taxpayers and practitioners.

I believe the policies and guidelines issued since the Anaheim conference by the Department of the Treasury will help to ensure that some of the questionable expenses we identified do not recur. However, notwithstanding these actions, we identified additional improvements needed and, again, made nine recommendations to enhance controls. The IRS agreed with these recommendations and in response has issued interim guidance. According to the IRS, this guidance will be formalized in a future update to the Internal Revenue Manual. Specifically, the IRS has issued guidance to: enhance controls over the monitoring and tracking of conference spending; clarify when conference sessions qualify for continuing professional education credits; ensure applicable IRS personnel are contacted to coordinate future conference spending; outline the appropriate use of nongovernmental event planners; clarify when planning trips should be performed for conferences; institute a video review board to approve requests for video development across the IRS; outline the appropriate use of hotel room suite upgrades by IRS employees; and clearly outline the need for and value provided by any information corridors and exhibitor halls. Once the IRS finalizes its interim guidance, we at TIGTA plan to issue a final report on whether the IRS has fully implemented all of our recommendations.

Chairman Carper, Dr. Coburn, Senator Johnson, thank you for the invitation to appear. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Thanks to each of you for what you have reported and shared with us today. It is actually quite encouraging, the work that you are doing and the folks that you lead are doing. We are grateful for that.

Dr. Coburn said to me at the end of the first panel, he said, "We are talking about culture change." And he said the kind of culture change we need, and I will paraphrase him, is to better ensure that Federal employees are spending Federal dollars as if it were their own money. And I think there is a lot of wisdom in those words.

I am not entirely sure how we do that, but I think in my life, and my guess is probably yours as well, when I have been involved in the expenditure of State monies as Governor and treasurer, I tried to think of it, if this were my money, how would I want to be spending it, and I would like to think I would bring the same kind of discipline today.

One of the things that was actually very effective for me in looking at the way that we managed State monies in Delaware in my earlier roles is that we had a reporter for our only statewide newspaper whose name was Ralph Moyed, and he is now deceased, but the last thing you wanted—a guy in my business, the last thing you wanted—and my guess is Dr. Coburn and Senator Johnson probably have reporters back in their States. The last thing I wanted to see was an article that he had written about one of the programs that I was responsible for running or expenditures that we had made that was kind of a "gotcha" piece that would be on the front page of the paper above the fold in Pearl Harbor size type.

What we would actually use is we were trying to think about doing something, an outlay or an expenditure or some policy, we would always say to ourselves, "Now, how would we like to see this

reported on by Ralph Moyed and see that front-page article above the fold in Pearl Harbor headline?" It was actually helpful discipline.

The first question I want to ask of you is this: You heard the first panel of witnesses that were here. You have given us your own testimony. Just react, if you will, to some of the discussion that you heard between them and with us, particularly how do we make sure that we do not backslide, the agencies do not backslide? What further can we do here from the Legislative Branch that would be constructive toward making sure that we do not backslide, that we actually build on the good work that is being done? Mr. George.

Mr. GEORGE. Senator Carper, and I refer to this in my statement—yes, you do not want a culture of people sitting in hot tubs taking pictures of themselves drinking flutes of champagne.

Chairman CARPER. At least not on Federal dollars.

Mr. GEORGE. Well, exactly. But there is no question that it is imperative that we do not go too far in the other direction, too; that people need to have interaction. Especially when you have an organization the size of the Internal Revenue Service and the great role that it plays, it has to ensure—the American people have to be assured of the fact that the people who are working for this organization are top-notch, are getting that oversight, and, again, there have been some recent scandals within the IRS where there has been a lack of communications between headquarters and some field offices. And I believe that, constant communication—and I am not saying you have to take 50 people with you, but the head of the agency, in this instance John Koskinen, the new Commissioner, is going out and is visiting his largest field offices. And that is extraordinarily important to ensure that the people out in the field who are the ones that the majority of Americans interact with do not feel a disconnect, the employees, the IRS employees—

Chairman CARPER. If I can interrupt just for a second, Secretary Jeh Johnson shared with us, Dr. Coburn and me, that is exactly what he is doing in his early days at Secretary, which is smart. Good thanks. Mr. Miller. Mr. Horowitz.

Mr. MILLER. Well, one of the things you raised earlier was what I will call the "human factor." Unfortunately, there is a human factor. You always have people who will try and circumvent the rules. And we saw that with the Western Regions Conference. We had individuals who knew what the rules were. They knew the rules so well that they knew how to circumvent them and minimize the rules. And, unfortunately, you will always have the human factor.

So as you said, Mr. Chairman, changing the culture is very important, a vital part of what we are doing, and having Federal officials treat the money as if it were their own and to be careful with the money—

Chairman CARPER. And I might add to that, it is all well and good that we want the rank-and-file to use good judgment, subscribe to these standards that are set. It is really important that the leaders of these agencies lead by their example, not do what I say but actually do what I do. Go ahead.

Mr. MILLER. Right, "tone at the top." And, we have identified a number of problems, and I can list a number of problems with the procurement process. But you could have a perfectly done procure-

ment for a clown, and it is still wasteful. So you need to have that leadership, the tone at the top.

Chairman CARPER. I wonder what a perfectly done procurement for a clown would look like. [Laughter.]

Mr. MILLER. Well, they would not be sharing source selection information, for one thing.

Chairman CARPER. I suspect not.

Mr. MILLER. But you do have this human factor. But you do have a number of other problems that it seems that the Administrator at GSA is trying to address and procedural problems, so, we do see some progress in theory. We have not had a chance to test it. As IGs, we look at facts, and we look at empirical evidence. And so at GSA we have not had a conference—well, Administrator Tangherlini has testified that there was not a conference over \$100,000, so we have not had occasion to do a strict audit to test the controls, to review the controls to see how effective they are.

So, it is one thing to patch a hole in a boat and say, well, the patch looks pretty good; but until you take it out on the sea, you will not really see if it is seaworthy.

Chairman CARPER. OK.

Mr. Horowitz, just very briefly, please.

Mr. HOROWITZ. Yes, just a couple things. I think what struck me as I listened to the first discussion and heard my fellow IGs is how similar the problems were across our agencies. You had not only the culture issues that have been discussed; you had a lack of controls such that senior management, no matter how much they wanted to oversee it, did not have the controls in place to actually do it. And you had a lack of good reporting data going upstream. And that has been talked about, and that is still an issue, as we have all found in our various audits.

So you need the culture. You need management to oversee it. But you also need to give them the tools and the ability to actually do the work we are talking about. And the other part of this, which Congress has legislated on, is the transparency issue, making sure the information gets out there because of the importance of the transparency on these conferences.

I will add just one other thing that we have talked about in our reports that I think is critical, and that is the cost/benefit analysis, it was touched on briefly but really has not seeped in across the board. It covers a variety of issues. We found it on event planners. Many of the components were doing it on their own. They did not need event planners. It was not hard work internally, what you would expect in an organization, private sector or public sector, to think about what is the benefit of what we are getting versus what we are spending. And that goes to what Senator Ayotte mentioned and some of the things we have talked about internally in my office, which is are folks being required to document before the conference what the value is, what the justification is, and afterwards, what is the after-action on it? Is someone doing followup?

There are not perfect systems in place. That is a very difficult thing to do. But the discipline of doing it in and of itself I think has great value.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Great. And before I turn it over to Dr. Coburn, I will just say this: We will be providing our colleagues

some time to submit questions for the record, and we would appreciate your prompt response to those questions.

One of the questions I will be submitting, again—and I mentioned this to the first panel—is that if there were to be some kind of legislative action relating to these issues to try to make sure that we do not backslide; by the same token, whether there is value in travel and in conferences that actually takes place. But if there were to be legislation, what would you suggest that we consider? And if you could collaborate and actually reach out to some other IGs, that would be all the better. Thank you. Dr. Coburn.

Senator COBURN. Thank you. Just to comment on Inspector General George's comment, there are conferences and then there is a conference. A Commissioner of the IRS going out to see his troops is not a conference. It is leadership. It is management. And if we cannot ascertain the difference between good management where you are going out to, one, be informed of the troops, but also communicate leadership, and a conference, then we have bigger problems than we have even begun to think about. And it kind of goes back to what Senator Tester mentioned in the earlier panel. It is not about that. We are not talking about that. We are talking about the excesses of meetings mainly for Federal employees and their benefit, and many times those are proper conferences that could be done much more economically with much lower costs and much more efficiently.

So I take your comments to heart, Inspector General George. There is no question we want them to continue to do that. We are not trying to squelch any of that. We want good leadership. And he is displaying that as he travels. So is Jeh Johnson as he travels. So it is not about that.

General Horowitz, if DOJ tomorrow for this year wanted to spend \$150 million on conferences, is there anything to keep them from doing it?

Mr. HOROWITZ. Subject to as long as the Attorney General (AG) approved the expense and—

Senator COBURN. Yes, so if they want to—

Mr. HOROWITZ [continuing]. Determined it was consistent with their guidelines, they could go forward and do it.

Senator COBURN. So even though 12-12 is on the books, there are no consequences for not following it.

Mr. HOROWITZ. Other than our after-the-fact review that we would do.

Senator COBURN. Yes, but that is after the fact, and the money is out the door. So the point is one of the things is transparency, which is part of that. But to really have transparency to where each agency submits their conference costs.

You mentioned private sector. There is not a business in the world that does not look at what it spends on conferences to see if they are getting value out of the conference. Do they sometimes use conferences as "atta-boy's" to motivate? Yes, and there is not anything wrong with the Federal Government doing that as well. But the question is: Did we get some value out of it as we spent those dollars?

And so there is a big cultural difference between Federal management and private management, and one is their job is depend-

ent on them doing it efficiently and effectively and they are growing the bottom line every year. The other is I am penalized if we do not spend all the money we have. That is the difference in the cultures.

And so I think, first of all, let me say to each of you I am so thankful you are where you are. I appreciate personally as a taxpayer, as a Senator, and as a grandfather that you have an open eye. I do not know what we would do without our Inspectors General in terms of catching things and bringing our attention. But I think the most important thing that I worry about is there is a spotlight right now. Everybody is focusing on it. It has been in the press. And that is not going to be the case 5 years from now.

So I am not fearful of having some legislation as long as it is commonsense, it does not restrict the ability of management to make good decisions, but the most important thing is transparency on what you are doing and why you are doing it and what the cost/benefit analysis is.

Do you all have any disagreement with that?

Mr. GEORGE. I do not have a disagreement with that, but if I may beg your indulgence, Senator, because you have raised some very cogent points and you touched on something that Senator Tester mentioned. When the IRS holds their nationwide Tax Forums, which, again, are extraordinarily beneficial for all involved, the most well attended one happens to be in Las Vegas because a lot of people like to go to Las Vegas. That does not mean that—and we have not had allegations that IRS employees have been out gambling instead of training. But it does bring together the tax preparer community, which is extraordinarily important when we have this ever changing tax policy that is occurring.

Senator COBURN. Well, there is no problem with that. The fact is they are out to educate the people who are key to compliance with the Tax Code. It does not matter where they have it because the vast majority of that money is not spent by the Federal Government. It is spent by the tax compliers. And they are free to spend their money any way they want. And so that may be a popular destination for the whole country. That is not the question. The question is not whether we are doing it to train people outside of the government. The question is: Are we doing this as a fluff or an “atta-boy” for Federal employees? And I think most of them would rather have a bump in their general schedule (GS) level or a bonus than travel. So we have hit that with a dead horse.

Mr. GEORGE. I can assure you, sir, I have never gone to Vegas, just for the record.

Senator COBURN. OK. [Laughter.]

One of the things I think would be interesting, General Miller, is what are the things that other agencies can learn from what you all have done in terms of looking at this? In other words, they do not have to reinvent the wheel. They can actually come and look at your work product and say we are going to go and apply this. Has that happened to your knowledge in other agencies? Have they contacted you and said, “Hey, we are looking at this. How did you go about it?”

Mr. MILLER. Not from other agencies. Other IGs have contacted me and said, “We are looking at conferences. What did you learn?”

How can we look at this effectively?" In fact, Russell contacted me and other IGs have contacted me about that.

But as far as other agencies, no, they have not. There are some general things to look at. Obviously, are employees familiar with the policies and procedures and regulations? Is there this lack of visibility that you talked about with the first panel? This problem of finding out how much did the conference cost. That was a huge problem with the Western Regions conference because they funded it out of about four or five different pots. And when you asked them how much did it cost, it was, a fraction of what the real cost was. And that is also our problem in looking at previous conferences at GSA over the years, because the stated cost is often not the true cost. And so tracking that funding is a huge—

Senator COBURN. That kind of goes to the Anaheim conference. You do not really know what the true cost of that conference is, correct?

Mr. GEORGE. That is correct.

Senator COBURN. Supposedly \$4.1 million, but you really do not know. It is in excess of that. We can all assume that.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes, we do not have an exact amount.

Senator COBURN. So one final point. Anything that we would do—one of the things, transparency is really helpful. So if, in fact, we had a report to Congress every year by each agency or to the OMB with a copy to Congress, here is what we spent on conferences, here is how many people attended, here is our cost/benefit analysis, this is on our website—like we said, they are supposed to be on the website, but they are not there, I can assure you. So that is not transparency.

So if, in fact, you say there is a report to Congress that is due every year, here is what we spent on conferences, here is how many people went, here is what our goals were, here is our cost/benefit analysis, just the fact that you have to report that—now, as you said, they are not always going to follow the law, but the fact is that now is a requirement of statute: justify your spending of money.

Then, in fact, we might see some change. There is no question we have. The Justice Department went from \$90 million to \$57 million now to \$23 million. So, we are at a fourth of what we were 3 years ago in just the Department of Justice. And one of the reasons, one is probably sequester, but the other is sunshine. Sunshine got put out there. And so all I want is—I am not always going to be here, Senator Carper is not going to be here, Senator Johnson is not going to be here. You are not always going to be here. It is not going to always be a priority. How do we make sure our thumb stays on this? And it has to be through transparency, and it has to be through forced transparency.

So my hope is that you all will teach us more about what we do. I would love to have your feedback on what you think we ought to put in that so it is not onerous.

The final point I would make is if that is onerous on an agency to do that, then they do not have the controls they need right now to make decisions about conferences. So it cannot be onerous, and if it is onerous, they do not know how they are operating their

agency, because they should have that information as it is. Thank you.

Mr. MILLER. If I could—

Chairman CARPER. Just very briefly.

Mr. MILLER. Dr. Coburn, obviously we are not policymakers, but we are law enforcement, and as law enforcement we like clear standards, we like bright lines. So that would be important in legislation.

Agencies also need flexibility to meet unforeseen circumstances and emergencies, so those are at least two very broad perspectives from an IG perspective, and we would be happy to work with your staff on the bill.

Senator COBURN. Thank you very much.

Chairman CARPER. All right. Thank you, Tom. Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think one thing we can do in terms of keeping that spotlight on this would be something the Committee—I am sorry that Senator Coburn is leaving. Senator Coburn—

Chairman CARPER. I am still here.

Senator JOHNSON. But I want to give him a shout-out. He has done a phenomenal job at issuing reports, whether it is his waste book or various ways of highlighting these issues on an annual basis. I think a really good bipartisan effort, Mr. Chairman, is if we as this Committee published once a year that accumulation from all the different agencies, here is what they spent on conferences. I would also suggest here is what we spent on travel and entertainment—well, there should not be entertainment, I guess, in the government. Certainly there is in private industry. So, again, we have to shine that spotlight, and this might be something this Committee could do, accumulating that information, and getting it out there so that agency heads realize that this information is going to be public every year and we are going to make a big deal about it, and that does not go away. That is a control that I think would actually work.

Mr. Horowitz, you talked about a lack of good reporting data. I just want to go through each Inspector General. Certainly a frustration of mine continues to be a lack of good information. I mean, the fact that we do not have a common accounting system, that we do not have a common way of accounting for these things is ridiculous. This government has been in existence a lot of years. The fact that we do not have that commonality through the agencies for reporting is ridiculous.

So I just want to go down the list here or down the table. What information do you need? I mean, how would you want to accumulate it?

Mr. HOROWITZ. Well, I think in today's day and age, better coding. The Deputy Director of OMB mentioned that in the first panel, how we code well on travel but not in the other areas. For example, when the Department makes a grant, the Department—let us assume the Department is not involved in the conference the grant recipient receives. There is no clear coding of that. For us to be able to go into the grant and see there was a conference held with grant money that the Department was not part of, we have to go rummage through the report back—

Senator JOHNSON. Is that a piece of legislation that is required? I mean, I would think the OMB could basically force agencies to do so and I was talking about how can we force action. I would think OMB could do this on their own. But do we need to pass a piece of legislation to get that commonality of coding?

Mr. HOROWITZ. Well, I certainly agree with you. I think stepping back and looking at what is available from the accounting standpoint, I am certainly happy to talk to my auditors from what they have seen in looking at cost accounting and where it could be helpful to them and report back to you on that.

Senator JOHNSON. OK. Mr. Miller.

Mr. MILLER. Well, one thing that would help us in analyzing conferences is for auditors to have read-only access to all electronic databases and to have that immediately so there is not a long delay in filling out forms and getting that access.

We have been successful in getting that access, but that would be an aspect that would help us to review the conferences. So that is one thing that would help.

Senator JOHNSON. If you had proper coding, though, would you really need the read-only access? Because wouldn't this information be readily available to any auditor?

Mr. MILLER. Well, we always want to verify.

Senator JOHNSON. OK.

Mr. MILLER. So, it may be coded incorrectly.

Senator JOHNSON. OK, got you.

Mr. MILLER. It would help, certainly.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. George.

Mr. GEORGE. Senator, I would request that the Appropriations Committee in their appropriations to an agency indicate on an annual basis or semiannual basis: we want a report on exactly how much money was expended toward this type of activity. And, I do not think that would be a rule against legislating on an appropriations bill; it is simply requesting a report on how the money was expended.

Senator JOHNSON. Well, that sets me up perfectly for my next question. So the first solution is about information, sunshine, shine the spotlight on the problem, the issue, so that agency heads, people in these agencies understand that the public will scrutinize what they are doing.

The second and probably the most effective control—and I just want to throw this question out to all of you. Do you know of a more effective control for squeezing efficiencies than restricting a budget? Is there anything better at generating efficiencies than decreasing what people have to spend? I will start with you, Mr. George.

Mr. GEORGE. Well, obviously, hearings such as this and reports from IGs have that impact. But then ultimately tying performance to how they conduct themselves in an area of this great import as it is as of now, so whether it is the Deputy Secretary or whether it is the Assistant Secretary for Management or the Chief Financial Officer, having, he or she—

Senator JOHNSON. That is not exactly what I was talking about. That is almost merit pay. What I am talking about, for example, Mr. George, you talked about the IRS. In fiscal year 2010, they

spent \$38 million on this, and then in fiscal year 2011 \$6 million, and then in fiscal year 2012 \$5 million. There I would think the IRS is going to have to squeeze some efficiencies out of their conference and travel spending, correct?

Mr. GEORGE. That is correct.

Senator JOHNSON. Is anybody squealing about that? Have we gone too far? Are we being penny-wise and pound-foolish spending \$5 million?

Mr. GEORGE. It is too early for me to make a definitive statement in response to that, sir, but we will definitely look at the impact that this has had on training and on other communications with taxpayers.

Senator JOHNSON. But as a manager in the private sector, that would be my first—if I have abuse in a Department, I would go, OK, you are getting less money, and let us see how you operate with less money. And, again, then you have the pushback, as Senator Ayotte and Senator Tester were talking about, in terms of that cost/benefit analysis, going, well, maybe it went too far.

Wouldn't that be a pretty effective control? I mean, we talk about all these controls in theory, but the most effective control is how much money do you have to spend?

Mr. GEORGE. I concur with everything that you have said, sir, but with the caveat again that when you are talking about the Internal Revenue Service, the income-generating arm of the U.S. Government, you really, if anything, want to ensure that they have the resources necessary. Yes, restrict how they can expend those resources, but I—

Senator JOHNSON. Oh, sure. No, I am talking about budgets within the agencies, how you allocate those funds.

Mr. Miller, do you have any disagreement with what I am saying there?

Mr. MILLER. No, none. Purse strings have always been an effective tool for the legislature.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Horowitz.

Mr. HOROWITZ. None.

Senator JOHNSON. Well, so there we go. We have a unanimous opinion there that—from my standpoint, the first place to start is in their budgets. Let us pare them back, let us force efficiency. Then we will go back to the agencies and go, "Did we go too far?"

Mr. HOROWITZ. And can I add on that, one of the important things about that is to understand then for the oversight body, the IGs, the leadership. How did each agency get there? What were the best practices? Sharing the information across departments so that others can benefit. Much as you have asked what we have done, I think that is the other part of it. How do you get efficiencies? Who is using the video teleconferencing? How are they using it? Who is using it most effectively?

Just to give you an example, one of the things on training that we have been struggling with at the Department, I have a law license. I need continuing legal education. I have my auditors, I have my agents. Webinars, private sector, being used widely. We are almost allowed to do it. For security reasons it has been a struggle to get there for the Department as a whole.

Senator JOHNSON. That is really what OMB should be driving. Ms. Cobert—I think she is in a perfect position. I think she has the exact skill set to be that accumulator of best practices, to disseminate that out to the agencies.

So, again, I want to also second what Dr. Coburn said as well, that it is the IG community, places like the GAO, that give us that kind of accountability. So I appreciate your service and really look forward to working with you in the future to make sure that we put these effective controls in place.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CARPER. Thank you.

I want to followup, just before we close out here, return to what one of the points I think Senator Johnson was making at the beginning of this round of questioning. I think what he is getting at is what are some of the challenges that your offices face in conducting audits and what do you need to enable you to improve the auditing of travel and conference spending. And I would just followup and add to that, do some of these accounting and reporting challenges affect other areas of your auditing and investigative work? I am going to ask you to answer that on the record, and we will provide that question on the record, but I want us to drill down on that point.

In closing, a couple of themes that I would like to close with. First of all, thanks again so much for your work and for being here with us today to be part of this. I think it is a very valuable conversation. A lot of times we beat ourselves up because we do not do a very good job, and with respect to our responsibilities and stewardship in government, I am actually encouraged that some very good work is being done, and we have seen the amount of money being spent in travel and conferences reduced by \$3 billion from 2010 to 2013. And my hope is that we have still gotten our money's worth, the taxpayers' money's worth for the dollars that are being expended. And my belief is that to the extent that we use that sunshine, use that transparency, we will continue to wring some savings out of this.

I would also say that I am, as Senator Johnson and others, interested in spending money in a smarter way, in some cases spending no money in a particular area or less money. But there are some areas where we find that we actually spend money and we get a multiple return of \$2, \$3, \$5, \$10 for the money that we outlay. So we have to be smart in keeping that in mind.

I like to—and Senator Johnson has heard me say this, talk about the two C's, communicate and compromise. These are two keys for a long marriage. They are also the keys for a vibrant democracy, communicate and compromise.

The third I sometimes mention is collaboration, and we have a good collaboration going on in this regard with respect to the spending in this area of our government. And you are a big part of it. I think we are. So is OMB, GAO, GSA, and some folks from the nonprofit groups. So we have to keep building on those three C's, I believe, going forward.

And the last thing I want to say, I think a fair amount about employee morale within the Federal workforce. We received just weeks ago an annual evaluation that is done by a nonprofit. They

evaluate in 300 Federal agencies the morale of the workforce. It is important. Why is that important? Well, it is important for us to attract good people, and it is important to retain them and for them to feel satisfaction in their work and maybe, hopefully from that, want to work even harder and be more effective.

I like to reflect on a study done about—reported about a year ago, it was an international study, and people around the world were asked the same question: What do you like about your work? That was the question. What do you like about your work? And people had different answers. Some people liked getting paid; they liked their paychecks. Some people liked getting a vacation. Some people liked having health care. Some people liked having a pension.

But the answer that was shared by more answers than any other was they appreciated most of all knowing that the work that they were doing was important and the feeling, the belief that they were making progress—that the work they were doing was important, and they felt that they were making progress. And I am sure there are some people who enjoy their job because of the trips they get to take, the conferences that they get to go to, the travel that they get to take.

But at the end of the day, I think Federal employees are like a lot of other people around the world. They know that the work that we are doing is important, and they want to go home at night and feel that we are making progress, that they are making progress and we are making progress, in part because they have better leadership, including Senate-confirmed leadership, and that they know that we are interested in trying to make sure they have the resources that they need. But, you cannot always get what you want, but if you try sometime, we can get what we need. And part of what we need here is good oversight and good direction and continued adherence to the three C's, especially that last one—collaboration.

All right. With that, I think it is a wrap. I think we have about 2 weeks for those who are Members of the Committee who would like to submit questions, and we just ask that, as you receive those, please respond to them promptly. We look forward to continuing to work with you on these venues and a lot of others.

With that having been said, we thank you again. It is good to see you all.

Mr. HOROWITZ. Thank you.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you.

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you.

Chairman CARPER. Keep up the good work, and please convey our thanks to the folks who work with you. All right? Thank you.

With that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:50 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

# A P P E N D I X

---

## **Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government January 14, 2014**

*As prepared for delivery:*

Good morning. Our thanks to today's witnesses and guests for joining us today to examine Federal agencies' conference and travel spending.

My thanks as well to Dr. Coburn and his staff for their help in putting this hearing together.

Today's hearing is part of this committee's continuous effort to look into every nook and cranny of federal spending and seek ways to improve results and save money.

In particular we are here today to discuss the progress agencies have made in cutting spending on conferences and travel, while better ensuring that the dollars being spent today and in the future make possible a more effective and efficient government and a better country.

In this time of deep federal deficits and challenging economic times, the people we work for, the tax payers, expect us to be good stewards of their hard earned money.

Unfortunately, in the last few years, several Inspectors General have documented wasteful and excessive spending at government conferences.

The Department of Justice, the General Services Administration, and the Internal Revenue Service have all made the news, and not in a positive way, for excessive conference spending.

The goal of our hearing today, though, is not to reexamine the well-documented excesses of the past. That has already been done in the media and in other committees.

Rather, the reason we are holding today's hearing is to get a better picture of the *current state* of agency spending on conferences, training, and travel and to understand if the culture that contributed to the problems we saw at Justice, GSA, and the IRS has changed.

There is good news to report. In May 2012, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance that required agencies to reduce federal spending on agency travel and to improve accountability on conference spending.

In addition, the challenging budget climate of the last few years has forced agencies to operate with less federal funding, which has, in turn, curtailed spending on travel, training and conferences, while focusing the dollars that are spent on activities and events whose value to agencies, to organizations, and citizens is clear.

As a result of these events, it is my understanding that in Fiscal Year 2013 agency conference and travel spending had decreased by more than \$3 billion as compared to Fiscal Year 2010. That's a significant reduction.

At today's hearing, I would like to hear from our witnesses about where things currently stand in this area.

Specifically, I would like to hear answers to the following questions:

- How much are agencies currently spending on conferences and travel?
- How has the OMB guidance been adopted and implemented across the government?
- What changes have the DOJ, GSA, and IRS made to their internal policies to address the problems found in those agencies?
- And finally, what lessons have been learned and what steps have been taken to make federal agencies better stewards of taxpayer money with respect to conferences and travel?

To help us answer these questions, we have two excellent panels for our hearing today.

On our first panel, we have Beth Cobert , the Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget and Dan Tangherlini, Administrator at the GSA.

On our second panel, we will hear from three Inspectors General from the Department of Justice, the GSA, and the Treasury Department, each of whom issued a report uncovering wasteful spending at our government agencies.

We are fortunate to have such distinguished witnesses for our hearing today and I look forward to their testimony.

Before wrapping up, I want to briefly touch on one issue and that is the importance of conferences and the value derived from these types of meetings.

Let me be crystal clear about one thing, though. There is no reasonable justification for the spending that took place at some government conferences over the past few years. It was wasteful and excessive – and simply inexcusable.

I often like to say though, that in adversity lies opportunity. And it certainly appears to me that in light of both these scandals and budget cuts, some good has come about in the sense that agencies have found ways to cut conference and meeting costs through technology, conference calls, and webinars.

However, we must not forget the value of face to face meetings amongst agencies and, more importantly, with those who work outside the federal government.

When properly planned and managed, conferences serve a legitimate and often times necessary purpose of fostering collaboration and partnerships between government employees, state regulators, academia and industry.

And while it is important that agencies make efforts to eliminate any wasteful spending on conferences and travel, we must be careful that we don't unduly restrict the ability of our agencies to interact with outside groups.

This Committee has heard from numerous groups – including state regulatory agencies, non-profits, military associations, and scientists – that are very concerned that conference and travel limitations could cut off their primary means of communication with federal agencies and affect their ability to interact with the government.

These are important concerns that the Executive branch and Congress must consider when shaping policy and I look forward to discussing them with our witnesses today.

I would also note that the Committee has received written statements from a range of interested groups and individuals, including the Majority Leader, that address the matters that we are discussing here today. I ask that all of these statements be included as part of the hearing record.

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
[www.whitehouse.gov/omb](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb)**

**Written Testimony of Beth F. Cobert  
Deputy Director for Management, Office of Management and Budget  
before the  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
January 14, 2014**

Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and members of the Committee, for the invitation to discuss travel and conference spending activity in the Federal Government. Today, I will mainly focus on the efforts to reshape how conferences are conducted in the Federal Government.

As stewards of taxpayers' dollars, the Federal Government must spend money wisely as well as find improvements and efficiencies in fiscal oversight. One of the ways this Administration has sought to save taxpayer money is by both reducing administrative costs, such as travel, and strengthening controls around conference activities. Over the last several years, this Administration has reduced conference spending in the Federal Government by rethinking how and why conferences are conducted as well as by increasing our use of technology such as video-conferencing and webinars in order to reduce travel costs. I will discuss further these actions and other agency initiatives in my testimony.

While the Administration has taken important steps to reduce conference spending, it is critical to recognize the important role that conferences play in the Federal Government. Conferences enable the sharing of knowledge among large groups and bring together dispersed communities. They facilitate collaboration and often spark innovation, such as the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Sovereign Challenge Conference. The USSOCOM Conference allowed an opportunity for international participants to engage in discussions of threats to national sovereignty, explore possible solutions and best practices, encourage individual and cooperative actions, and build relationships with and among international attendees. The face-to-face interaction afforded by the conference proceedings spurred further collaboration that assisted USSOCOM in achieving its mission

Additionally, there are times when physical collocation is both helpful and necessary. This is often the case with the scientific community. For example, conferences allow all levels of the U.S. science and engineering (S&E) community to connect, from established experts presenting cutting-edge work to graduate students beginning their career. The primary goal for an S&E conference is to bring a community of scientists and engineers together and provide opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The result of a 2004-2005 survey of over 1000 scientific conference attendees published in [The Scientist Magazine](#) indicated that: (1) over two thirds of respondents reported learning something that changed the direction of their research; (2) over half reported learning something at the meeting that had saved them time and money in their own work; and (3) sixty percent reported that their meeting attendance led to a new collaboration. Conferences can and do produce important results.

Furthermore, convening Federal employees and external stakeholders at a single location sometimes can be the most efficient and cost-effective means for carrying out

Government-sponsored activities. Examples include: presentation of scientific findings, oversight boards or advisory group meetings, and standards-setting committees. Several agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services rely on such conferences with industry and academic colleagues to drive innovation and ensure continued advancement in related fields. In reviewing research at conferences, the Federal S&E employees and program managers not only stay abreast of their Federal Research and Development investment portfolios but also see significant cost savings in lieu of performing multiple site visits to each research performer's laboratory.

It is important to reiterate that while conferences can perform useful functions, conference related spending, as well as all administrative spending, must be managed in a responsible way. This Administration has taken several steps to ensure we are managing our spending effectively. Examples include:

- In June 2011, the Administration made the Chief Financial Officers accountable for each agency's share of the \$2.1 billion in administrative cost savings identified in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Budget through Executive Order 13576, "Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government."
- In September 2011, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) required all agencies to conduct a thorough review of their conference-related activities and expenditures by issuing OMB Memorandum-11-35, "Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government."
- In November 2011, the Administration required agencies to reduce administrative costs by no less than 20 percent below 2010 spending levels in categories such as travel, IT devices, printing, executive fleet, and promotional items through Executive Order 13589, "Promoting Efficient Spending."
- In May 2012, OMB expanded upon efforts to reduce administrative costs by requiring a 30 percent reduction in travel spending as compared to 2010 levels, and imposed additional limitations and policies related to conferences by issuing OMB Memorandum-12-12, "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations."
- In May 2013, OMB clarified the importance of conferences and provided best practices in managing conference cost in an era of fiscal constraint by issuing a Controller Alert, "CONTROLLER ALERT: Travel and Conferences."
- In December 2013, the General Services Administration (GSA) provided clarification on defining a conference in GSA Bulletin FTR 14-02, "Clarification of Agency Reporting Requirements for Conferences," to ensure we are reviewing and reporting on conferences and not on mission critical co-location events that were never meant to be included in the requirements.

Our efforts are paying off. In FY 2013, agencies reduced travel costs by \$3 billion compared to FY 2010 levels. While we are happy to see costs reduced, we will continue our efforts to maintain efficient spending. Agencies will continue to hold their travel spending to 30 percent below FY 2010 levels – unless the agency can show that certain reductions would undermine critical government functions such as national security, international diplomacy, health and safety, law enforcement, and site visits for oversight or investigatory purposes. To

maintain this lower level of spending, agencies are evaluating and rethinking how they conduct conferences that have resulted in several innovative collaborations. For example:

- The Department of the Treasury achieved \$181 million in travel savings in FY 2013. This was accomplished by: implementing more restrictive guidance and approval requirements for hosting and attending conferences; increasing the use of IT enhanced tools such as video conferencing for in-person meetings, training, and conferences; reducing the number of employees attending conferences, reducing the number of participants attending training events; and, canceling multiple annual conferences.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reduced FY 2013 travel spending by \$35 million when compared to FY 2010 levels. EPA continues to: (1) focus on increased use of technology such as video-conferencing, webinars, teleconferencing and collaboration tools; (2) use Government-owned space and scheduling of back-to-back meetings to reduce expenses; and (3) ensure that only essential travel is conducted, participation at conferences and meetings is appropriate, and that the number and frequency of face-to-face meetings and conferences hosted by EPA is limited to only the most essential gatherings. EPA issued internal guidance on travel and conference-related spending that ensures strict adherence to policies and controls.
- The Department of Interior (DOI) achieved \$99 million in FY 2013 travel savings as compared to FY 2010 levels. A comprehensive program is in place to manage conference activities and spending, including close scrutiny of all conferences based on DOI policy, and Deputy Secretary/Associate Deputy Secretary review of all conferences over \$100,000. DOI also continues efforts to increase the use of technology in lieu of travel, modify relocation policies and practices to reduce costs, and monitor travel ceilings and conferences using internal controls.
- The Department of Labor reduced travel spending in FY 2013 by \$29 million when compared to FY 2010 levels. This was accomplished by reducing site visit travel by substituting the site visits with desk reviews, electronic meetings and enhanced risk analysis; increasing the use of video-conferencing and webinars rather than face to face meetings; and, increasing the combining or co-scheduling of meetings in the same geographic area.
- The Department of Defense (DoD) reduced spending on hosting conferences with a total cost of more than \$100,000 by \$69 million or 78 percent in FY 2013 when compared to FY 2012 – spending \$20 million in FY 2013 vs. \$89 million in FY 2012. This was accomplished by hosting only 78 conferences with a total cost of more than \$100,000 in FY 2013 as opposed to 295 conferences in FY 2012. Consistent with OMB direction, DoD focused on instituting robust conference oversight procedures, combining previously separate conferences, cancelling many conferences, and increasing visibility through the implementation of a new, centralized conference tracking/reporting tool that was integrated with the Defense Travel System.

The Administration remains committed to responsibly managing conference activities and ensuring that conference spending across the Government supports mission critical activities. It is imperative that the Federal Government continue to improve how we conduct business and provide services to the American people while increasing public transparency. It is also imperative that our efforts not undercut or prevent agencies from achieving their mission or

create new significant cost in an effort to be compliant with conference review and reporting requirements. Moving forward, we are continuing to sharpen our understanding of both the value of conference attendance to mission critical Departmental activities and the opportunities to reduce expenditures - both of which are central to continued good stewardship of the taxpayer dollar.

In my private sector experience we faced similar issues in how to balance spending dollars in the best way possible on conferences and travel. I see the same need within the Federal Government, and look forward to using what I learned in my prior position to help expand the progress agencies are already making in reducing travel and conference costs.

Thank you again for the invitation to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.



U.S. General Services  
Administration

Dan Tangherlini  
Administrator

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
"Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal  
Government"  
January 14, 2014

Good morning Chairman Carper, Doctor Coburn, and Members of the Committee. My name is Dan Tangherlini, and I am the Administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA).

GSA's mission is to deliver the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology services to Government and the American people. GSA's travel policies reflect this mission. GSA instituted internal travel and conference policies that reduce costs, provide strong oversight, and ensure that travel only occurs when necessary. Additionally, as part of GSA's mission to serve our Federal partners and reduce costs, we are providing tools that assist agencies to better manage their travel and conference spending.

*GSA's Policies –*

GSA has rigorous controls and oversight mechanisms to ensure that all proposed travel and conference expenses are cost-effective, serve legitimate mission needs, and have appropriate levels of review.

Travel can only be approved when all other alternatives, including video-conferencing, teleconferencing, and webinars have been considered. Additionally, travel must be for work related to GSA's essential mission, such as building inspections. To ensure all travel requests received appropriate review, GSA has instituted policies that limit the use of blanket authorizations and require that travel is authorized in advance on a trip-by-trip basis.

Conferences require submission of a detailed justification, a proposed budget, and review and approval from multiple divisions. At a minimum, this means any conference, no matter the proposed cost, is reviewed both by the head of the relevant division and GSA's Chief Administrative Services Officer (CASO). In line with Administration policies, when the proposed cost of a conference is more than \$100,000, the Deputy Administrator must approve it. Conferences over \$500,000 are prohibited unless I approve them and document the justification for why they must be held. Even attendance at a conference requires multiple layers of approval. Employees must submit for approval a justification for their attendance and an estimate of their expenses.

GSA requires online training regarding conference attendance for GSA employees. This training highlights GSA's important policy of considering cost-effective alternatives like teleconferencing, and ensures every employee understands the difference between

appropriate and inappropriate expenses. Employees receive training regarding the Federal Travel Regulation, ensuring better compliance. GSA has also presented the conference training to other agencies to either incorporate into their own training courses or to use our web capability for their own agency use.

In line with the Administration's policies, GSA also has improved transparency into conference expenses. We post all approved, agency-sponsored conferences with a cost of over \$100,000 on a publicly available website that includes the budget and a justification for why the conference was held. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, GSA held no conference above that amount.

All told, these policies have dramatically reduced costs, improved oversight, and made certain that travel and conference expenses are fully justified and mission-related. In Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013, GSA saved in total more than \$68 million in nonessential travel and transportation costs.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Government-Wide Efforts –*

This Administration has been clear about the need to cut wasteful spending and increase efficiency. Executive Order 13589, "Promoting Efficient Spending," directs agencies to cut waste in Federal Government spending and identify opportunities to promote efficient and effective spending, including a reduction in conference and travel costs. OMB Memorandum M-12-12, "Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations," implements the executive order, and provides policies and practices to achieve these efficiencies. Among other items, this Memorandum directs agencies to require the approval of senior officials for conferences with expenses over \$100,000, prohibit conferences with expenses of more than \$500,000 (unless the agency's head provides a waiver finding that exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a mission goal), and increase transparency by reporting these costs publicly.

To further these efforts Government-wide, GSA has identified ways we can assist agencies by providing tools to help them better manage their travel and conference costs. For example, to help agencies prioritize use of Federally-owned space, GSA has created an online tool known as "Federal Meeting Facilities,"<sup>2</sup> which identifies Federal agencies that have conference and meeting space for agencies' use. Conducting

---

<sup>1</sup> Compared to an FY 2010 baseline.

<sup>2</sup> "Federal Meeting Facilities." *U.S. General Services Administration*. February 2013. U.S. General Services Administration. February 2013. <http://fedmeetingspace.cfo.gov>.

business and hosting conferences in space controlled by the Federal Government is one way to reduce travel and related costs. The tool allows agencies to search and sort through a variety of different offerings, with contact information for the agency point of contact to work with to secure the space.

Additionally, GSA's E-Gov Travel Service 2 (ETS2) will further consolidate online travel booking services, driving additional cost-savings and efficiencies, while delivering improved accountability and reducing waste. ETS2 will adhere to regulations and support policy for conference travel spending reporting and other travel related activities, in order to both meet the requirements of OMB and provide greater transparency for customer agencies.

GSA is also utilizing data to allow agencies to make more informed decisions about where to host conferences, when they are determined to be necessary to their mission. GSA's Conference Planning Tool compares potential destinations by major cost drivers, such as contract airfare and per diem rates, enabling agencies to make data-backed decisions on where conferences should be held. GSA is training administrative officers in over 20 Federal agencies on how to identify low cost destinations and venues for conferences and meetings.

Additionally, GSA eliminated what was known as the conference lodging allowance. Previously, this permitted travelers attending a conference to exceed the maximum lodging per diem rate by up to 25 percent, if staying at the site of the conference, when authorized.

Finally, GSA is interested in finding ways to further reduce the Government's travel costs long-term. In FY 2012, GSA formed the Government-Wide Travel Advisory Committee (GTAC). The GTAC's purpose is to review existing travel policies, processes, and procedures to determine ways agencies can achieve their mission-related travel needs in an effective and efficient manner at the lowest possible cost. To ensure we received input from all relevant stakeholders, the Committee's members were chosen from the travel industry, Federal, State and local governments, travel and convention bureaus, and representatives from corporations. The GTAC has been providing advice and recommendations for improvements to increase travel efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs, and incorporate industry best practices. To ensure transparency on how recommendations have been formulated, Committee business is posted publicly, in line with the rules for Federal Advisory Committees. The GTAC worked in partnership with industry to formally review and endorse GSA's methodology for determining Federal per diem rates, which we used to adjust FY 2014 rates.

In sum, GSA believes that these Government-wide efforts will result in significant savings for the Federal government and the American people.

*Conclusion –*

The Administration is focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Government, including reducing travel and conference costs. GSA is committed to helping with those efforts. GSA has rigorous internal policies, provides tools to other agencies to help them make more informed travel and conference spending decisions, and is working on broader reforms and programs that would result in greater savings long-term.

GSA is fully dedicated to its mission of delivering best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology services to the Government and the American people. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I welcome any questions you have.



Office of the Inspector General  
United States Department of Justice

Statement of Michael E. Horowitz  
Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice

*before the*

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

*concerning*

Examining Conference and Travel Spending  
Across the Federal Government

January 14, 2014

Chairman Carper, Senator Coburn, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. Identifying waste and abuse in the Department of Justice (Department or DOJ) is a crucial responsibility of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and one which we have pursued through our many audits, investigations, evaluations, and inspections. The OIG strongly supports strict accountability of the use of taxpayer funds and is committed to vigorous oversight of conference expenditures by the Department. Effective oversight involves not only identifying wasteful spending, but also ensuring that effective internal controls are in place and providing recommendations to mitigate any future abuses. I am pleased to outline for the Committee the OIG's previous and upcoming efforts to review spending by the Department on conferences and evaluate the Department's efforts to strengthen its internal controls in this area.

Starting in FY 2008, and in each year since, the appropriations law for DOJ has included a requirement that the Attorney General report to the OIG the cost of any conferences that exceeded a certain threshold (for FY 2008 to 2012, the threshold was \$20,000; for FY 2013, the threshold was \$100,000). The DOJ reported to the OIG in FY 2008 that it spent nearly \$48 million on conferences that exceeded the \$20,000 threshold figure; in FY 2010 that amount was over \$91 million. The FY 2012 cost reports show that DOJ reported spending almost \$58 million on conferences that cost more than \$20,000 each in FY 2012.

Since 2007, the OIG has conducted two audits of spending by the Department on conferences. In those reports, we identified significant concerns regarding both conference expenditures and inadequate reporting of conference costs by DOJ components to Department leadership. Following our audits, the Department took steps to address the concerns we identified. Let me briefly summarize for the Committee the findings that we made in those audits and the corrective actions that the Department said it would implement.

In September 2007, the OIG issued an audit report examining the 9 most expensive domestic conferences sponsored by DOJ components between October 2004 and September 2006, as well as the most expensive international conference during that same time period. This audit was conducted following a request by the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies. In total, these 10 conferences reviewed in the audit cost approximately \$6.2 million, with three conferences each exceeding \$1 million including travel costs.

We found that three categories of costs – external event planning, food and beverages, and audio-visual – represented 71 percent of the \$6.2 million spent to plan and host the 10 conferences. Conference event planners, as the name suggests, provide logistical service support for conferences, such as by

selecting venues, negotiating lodging rates, and working with hotels on menus. Our audit found that while some DOJ components internally planned their conferences, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), other DOJ components, such as the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), procured external conference event planners by awarding contracts or through cooperative agreements. We also found that the costs for external event planning expenses varied considerably. For example, the conference event planners for two conferences applied approved overhead rates of about 82 and 131 percent, respectively, on all direct labor charges. These conference event planners also applied a general and administrative charge on all direct conference costs. In contrast, the conference event planner for another conference charged a flat hourly labor rate that included all direct and indirect costs. This conference event planner then charged a 3 percent handling fee to all non-labor conference planning costs. We found in our report that Department sponsors of the conferences we reviewed did not ensure that conference event planners offered the best value for the fees charged.

In addition, we found that expenditures for some food items – particularly those associated with meals and receptions – appeared to be excessive. While serving food and beverages at events might be allowable, we raised concerns about significant service charges applied to food and beverages. Similar to rules governing food and beverage costs, federal agencies have considerable discretion in how much they choose to spend on audio and visual equipment and services at government-sponsored conferences. In our 2007 audit, we found that components and event planners spent over \$760,000 on audio-visual equipment and services for the 10 conferences we examined, making audio-visuals the third largest category of conference expenditures.

Further, we identified inconsistent reporting of conference expenditures by DOJ components to Department leadership. Our audit found that some components reported conference costs as budgeted, awarded, and estimated instead of actual expenses, while others did not uniformly include travel or personnel costs. In addition, the Department did not maintain a single financial reporting system capable of providing the costs of DOJ conferences.

As a result of our review, we provided 14 recommendations to the Department and its components. For example, the OIG recommended that DOJ implement specific guidance regarding what cost comparisons are required in order to consider lower cost conference locations and venues; develop conference food and beverage policies; and evaluate methods to solicit, hire, and assess external conference event planners to ensure that conference planning costs comply with appropriate conference planning.

In response to our recommendations, the Justice Management Division (JMD) issued Financial Management Policies and Procedures Bulletin Number

08-08 in April 2008, which established guidelines on conference planning and expenditure reporting. After reviewing the policies, the OIG closed its recommendations knowing we would evaluate the effectiveness of these policies in a subsequent audit.

In September 2011, the OIG issued a second audit that reviewed a judgmental sample of 10 DOJ conferences that occurred between October 2007 and September 2009, and which cost over \$4.4 million, to determine whether DOJ components properly accounted for and minimized costs of conference planning, meals, and refreshments.

Our 2011 report found that DOJ components spent \$600,000 (14 percent of costs) to hire “training and technical assistance providers” as conference event planners for 5 conferences without demonstrating that these firms offered the most cost effective logistical event planning services. Additionally, we found that, of this \$600,000, over \$242,000 was the result of indirect costs billed by the conference event planners. We found that some of the conference event planners applied indirect rates only to their staff salary and benefit expenses, while others applied indirect rates to the cost of every service or item procured for a conference, such as employee travel, food and beverages, and audio-visual rentals. We concluded that applying indirect rates to all costs, although allowable under some cooperative agreement terms, increased the final price of already-expensive conference services and items. In addition, DOJ spent about \$490,000 (11 percent of costs) on food and beverages at the 10 conferences. Our assessment of these food and beverage charges revealed that some DOJ components did not minimize conference costs as required by federal and DOJ guidelines.

In this 2011 report, we made 10 recommendations to help Department components properly account for and minimize conference costs. For example, we recommended that DOJ use training and technical assistance providers in planning conferences only when it can be demonstrated that it is the most cost-effective method of providing logistical services. We further recommended that components and their event planners be required to conduct a cost-benefit analysis when considering whether to order food and beverages in order to obtain free meeting space for their conferences. Additionally, we recommended that Department components establish and implement guidelines on conference food and beverage limits for conferences supported with cooperative agreement funds congruent with DOJ-wide rules.

Shortly after we released our audit, the Office of Management Budget (OMB) issued memoranda in September 2011 to the heads of executive branch departments and agencies on eliminating excessive conference costs and providing efficient conference spending to support agency operations. Among other things, OMB instructed all agencies to conduct a thorough review of its policies and controls associated with conference-related activities and

expenses. To expand upon these efforts, OMB subsequently issued, in May 2012, new policies and practices for conference sponsorship, hosting, and attendance to ensure that federal funds were being used appropriately, and that agencies continued to reduce spending on conferences where practicable. The guidance required senior level review and approval of all planned conferences expected to exceed \$100,000, prohibited expenses exceeding \$500,000 on a single conference unless an agency head both determined that exceptional circumstances existed and provided a written waiver, and required agencies to report on conference expenses on their public websites.

To address our recommendations in the 2011 report and the OMB guidance, on June 8, 2012, the Department issued DOJ Policy Statement 1400.1, *Planning, Approving, Attending and Reporting Conferences*, which updated JMD's conference planning policies. The revised DOJ statement included policies intended to improve the accuracy and consistency of how JMD received conference cost data from individual components. In addition, the Department's Policy Statement required component head written approval of any conference costing more than \$100,000 and Attorney General written approval for any costing more than \$500,000. Additionally, the policies require Assistant Attorney General for Administration approval of any event scheduled for a non-federal facility or when costs are anticipated to exceed those permitted under the policy. As a result of this updated policy statement from the Department, the OIG decided to close the recommendations in our 2011 report.

Under OMB Memorandum 12-12, DOJ must publicly report, by January 31, all conferences held during the prior fiscal year with net costs that exceeded \$100,000. Once the list of conferences for FY 2013 is made available by DOJ later this month, the OIG intends to initiate, shortly thereafter, an audit of certain of those FY 2013 conferences. This review will enable the OIG to not only evaluate whether the Department expended funds in an appropriate manner, but also to evaluate conferences that were planned and conducted following the issuance of the Department's June 2012 conference cost guidelines in order to assess how the new controls have impacted Department conference expenditures and whether they have improved the accuracy and consistency of cost reports by DOJ components and resulted in more prudent spending.

The OIG plays a critical role in ensuring that each dollar of taxpayer money is spent effectively and efficiently. We will continue to do all we can to oversee conference expenditures by the Department to ensure that extravagant and unnecessary conference costs are prevented and, if they do occur, are exposed and immediately remediated. This concludes my prepared statement, and I would be pleased to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

**Statement of Honorable Brian D. Miller**  
**Inspector General**  
**General Services Administration**



**Committee on Homeland Security & Government Affairs**

**United States Senate**

**January 14, 2014**

---

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I appreciate the Committee's long-standing interest in oversight as well as its continued support of my office's oversight efforts.

Our reviews of GSA conferences found: contracts signed by individuals without a contracting warrant; contracting officers being brought in after-the-fact to ratify decisions already taken by event planners rather than in the initial acquisition planning stages; the use of outside event planners without a contract with the Agency; improperly providing source information to contractors; and other examples of non-compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation and the General Services Administration Acquisition Regulation.

After our report on the Western Regions Conference, Congressional oversight and transparency increased, which led to more accountability and internal controls. For example, GSA has reorganized and consolidated its Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of Administrative Services, which implemented tight controls over conference and travel spending. Additionally, GSA introduced an online training session on conference attendance that is mandatory for every employee.

The Congress enacted the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-6) requiring agencies to report conferences costing over \$20,000 to their Offices of Inspectors General within 15 days. Additionally, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12 directed agencies to significantly reduce travel expenses, initiate senior level review and approval of all planned and future conference expenses in excess of \$100,000, prohibit expenses in excess of \$500,000 unless an agency head provides a waiver in writing, and publicly report on all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000. The memorandum also

directed the Department of Defense, GSA, and OMB to review the Joint Federal Travel Regulations and the Federal Travel Regulation to ensure that policies promote cost savings.

Theoretically, these requirements should discourage further conference abuses. I think a continued focus on transparency in conference spending will help ensure that internal controls and accountability remain. While I am encouraged by the steps GSA has taken, we have not had occasion to review a more recent conference, and accordingly, our assessment, while positive, is only theoretical.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for their continued support of my office. I welcome any questions the Committee has.

HEARING BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
U.S. SENATE

"INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE CONFERENCE  
SPENDING"



Testimony of  
The Honorable J. Russell George  
Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration

January 14, 2014

Washington, D.C.

TESTIMONY  
OF  
THE HONORABLE J. RUSSELL  
GEORGE  
TREASURY INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR TAX ADMINISTRATION  
*before*  
*the*  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
U.S. SENATE

"Internal Revenue Service Conference Spending"

January 14, 2014

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to provide testimony on the subject of conference spending by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).<sup>1</sup> The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, also known as TIGTA, plays a critical role in ensuring that the approximately 93,800<sup>2</sup> IRS employees who each year collect over \$2.1 trillion in tax revenue, process over 147 million individual tax returns, and issue approximately \$333 billion in tax refunds, do so in an effective and efficient manner while minimizing the risks of waste, fraud, and abuse.

The IRS reported that it held 225 conferences during Fiscal Years (FY) 2010 through 2012 at a total estimated cost of approximately \$49 million. My testimony today summarizes a report<sup>3</sup> issued by my office that focused on the August 2010 IRS Small Business/Self-Employed (SB/SE) Division conference held in Anaheim, California (hereinafter referred to as the Anaheim conference). According to information obtained from the IRS, the Anaheim conference was attended by 2,609 employees at an estimated cost of approximately \$4.1 million. We focused our audit work on this conference specifically because of an allegation that TIGTA received about excessive spending at the Anaheim conference and because it was the most expensive conference held by the IRS during FYs 2010 through 2012.

---

<sup>1</sup> For this audit, we defined conferences as an IRS-sponsored meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, training, or other event that involved travel for 50 or more attendees. In addition, a conference is defined in the Federal Travel Regulations as "[a] meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel. The term 'conference' also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404." See 41 CFR 300-3.1.

<sup>2</sup> Total IRS staffing as of November 2, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> TIGTA, Ref. No. 2013-10-037, *Review of the August 2010 Small Business/Self-Employed Division's Conference in Anaheim, California* (May 2013).

**RESULTS OF REVIEW**

TIGTA identified several areas of concern associated with the August 2010 SB/SE Anaheim conference and made recommendations to ensure taxpayer funds are expended more efficiently in the future. For example, TIGTA determined that the IRS did not use available internal personnel to assist in searching for the most cost-effective location as required. Instead, SB/SE Division management approached two non-governmental event planners to identify a suitable off-site location for the conference. These two planners were not under contract with the IRS; hence they had no incentive to negotiate a favorable room rate for the IRS. Instead, the three hotels paid the event planners an estimated \$133,000 commission based on the cost of rooms paid for by the IRS. TIGTA also identified other questionable expenses related to the conference including planning trips, outside speakers, video productions, an information corridor, and promotional items and gifts for IRS employees.

In total, TIGTA made nine recommendations to the IRS on improvements that will strengthen controls over conference expenditures. In their response to our report, IRS management agreed with all of TIGTA's recommendations. Since the issuance of our report, the IRS has addressed many of our recommendations with interim guidance that it plans to formalize through updates to the Internal Revenue Manual.<sup>4</sup>

**APPROVAL AND ACCOUNTING FOR ANAHEIM CONFERENCE EXPENSES**

According to IRS management, this conference provided a unique opportunity for leadership development, skills sharing, and collaboration on key issues. As required by IRS procedures, the Anaheim conference was approved by the Deputy Commissioner for Operations Support as well as the Deputy Commissioner for Services and Enforcement.

We determined that the IRS did not adequately track and monitor the costs for the Anaheim conference. While IRS management provided documentation showing the total final costs at \$4.1 million, we could not obtain reasonable assurance that this amount represented a full and accurate accounting of the conference costs. The lack of adequate tracking of costs may have been due to the lack of a requirement that IRS management track and report actual conference costs.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Internal Revenue Manual is the primary official source of IRS instructions to staff that relate to the administration and operation of the IRS.

## **ANAHEIM CONFERENCE PLANNING**

The IRS did not follow established guidelines when selecting Anaheim, California for the conference location because it did not use available internal personnel to identify the most cost-effective location. Instead, IRS management approached two non-governmental event planners to identify an off-site location for the Anaheim conference. These event planners were not under contract with the IRS, but were instead each paid a five percent commission directly by the hotels based on the cost of rooms paid for by the IRS. Since the event planners were directly compensated based on the room rate, there was no incentive to negotiate for a lower room rate and thus save the IRS money. In addition, several IRS employees made three planning trips in advance of the Anaheim conference that cost the Government over \$35,000.

## **CONFERENCE EXPENSES AND ITEMS GIVEN TO ATTENDEES**

The Anaheim conference included numerous expenses beyond basic travel costs, including the costs of videos produced for the event and outside speaker costs of more than \$135,000. In addition, concessions provided by the hotels included room upgrades, cocktails, and daily continental breakfasts.

### **Conference Expenses**

We identified several additional questionable expenses related to the Anaheim conference. For example, the IRS produced two videos that were shown at the conference. IRS management advised us that it spent \$50,187 for video costs at the Anaheim conference; however, it did not provide any details on the cost or provide any supporting documentation describing how this money was spent.

Additional conference expenses included the following:

- \$135,350 for 15 outside speakers, including two keynote speakers.
- \$29,364 in per diem<sup>5</sup> expenses authorized by the Commissioner, SB/SE Division for employees who worked in the Anaheim area.
- More than \$44,000 in travel costs for 42 IRS employees who staffed booths in an "information corridor," *i.e.*, an exhibitor hall that was staffed by representatives from various offices within the IRS.

---

<sup>5</sup> The per diem allowance (also referred to as subsistence allowance) is a daily payment instead of reimbursement for actual expenses for lodging, meals, and related incidental expenses.

- More than \$64,000 in gifts and promotional items provided to attendees. This includes approximately \$27,000 in promotional items provided at the information corridor booths.

### **Hotel Concessions**

As part of its agreement with the Anaheim hotels, the IRS received certain concessions including several food and beverage requests. This included a welcome reception with food and cocktails, daily continental breakfast, as well as beverages and snacks during morning and afternoon breaks. Additionally, as part of the agreement signed with the hotels, the IRS received up to 132 upgraded rooms each night, as well as 10 free rooms.<sup>6</sup> As part of the agreement, the hotels charged the IRS the Federal Government rate of \$135 per night for paid rooms, including suites. We believe the IRS may have been able to negotiate with the hotels to get a reduced room rate if some of these services were not included and event planners were not used.

### **ACTIONS TAKEN SINCE THE 2010 CONFERENCE**

During FYs 2010 through 2012, the IRS reported that it spent approximately \$49 million on at least 225 conferences. Spending has fallen from approximately \$38 million in FY 2010, to approximately \$6 million in FY 2011, and \$5 million in FY 2012. The IRS attributes the reductions in annual spending since FY 2010 in part to enhanced controls over conference spending.

The IRS has issued several policy and guidance documents in the last few years requiring additional approval for conference spending and limiting expenditures on certain items such as promotional items. In addition, the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of the Treasury have issued guidelines that limit conference spending and require additional approval for conference spending that exceeds certain thresholds. Specifically, Treasury guidance now requires that any conference hosted or sponsored by Department of the Treasury bureaus costing \$250,000 or more must be approved by the Secretary of the Treasury. In addition, Treasury guidance issued in places limitations on the use of non-governmental event planners because their use can reduce the Department of the Treasury's control over conference expenses and increase costs.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Upgraded rooms included a variety of rooms such as studio suites, two-bedroom suites, and presidential suites.

<sup>7</sup> Treasury Directive 12-70, *Guidance and Procedures for Hosted or Sponsored Conference Planning and Approval*, May 6, 2013.

I also want to point out that conferences can serve an important function for the IRS. For example, the IRS Nationwide Tax Forums offer three full days of seminars presented by IRS personnel in the fields of tax law, compliance, and ethics. Attendees, such as tax preparers, can earn educational credits by attending various seminars and workshops. These forums provide training and outreach to taxpayers and practitioners.

I believe that the procedures implemented since the Anaheim conference occurred will help to ensure that some of the questionable expenses we identified do not happen again. However, notwithstanding those actions, we have identified additional improvements needed and made nine recommendations to enhance controls. The IRS agreed with our recommendations and has issued interim guidance in response to our recommendations. According to the IRS, this guidance will be formalized in a future update to their Internal Revenue Manual. Specifically, the IRS has issued guidance to:

- Enhance controls over the monitoring and tracking of conference spending;
- Clarify when conference sessions qualify for continuing professional education credits;
- Ensure that appropriate IRS personnel are contacted to coordinate future conference planning;
- Outline the appropriate use of non-governmental event planners when planning IRS conferences;
- Clarify when planning trips should be performed for conferences;
- Outline the appropriate use of hotel room suite upgrades by IRS employees; and
- Justify the need for any information corridors/exhibitor halls and other technology for future conferences.

In addition, the IRS instituted a video review board that is tasked with approving any requests for video development Service-wide. Although the IRS reviewed whether Forms W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, should be issued to the employees TIGTA identified as potentially incurring taxable travel, they did not review all local employees who attended the Anaheim conference to ensure all Forms W-2 were issued as TIGTA recommended.

We at TIGTA are committed to delivering our mission of ensuring an effective and efficient tax administration system and preventing, detecting, and deterring waste, fraud, and abuse. As such, we plan to provide continuing audit coverage of the IRS's

efforts to operate efficiently and effectively and investigate any instances of IRS employee misconduct.

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on our work on this tax administration issue.

HARRY REID  
NEVADA

MAJORITY LEADER

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7010

January 14, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
344 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

I appreciate your commitment to eliminating unnecessary expenses throughout the federal government. As you conduct today's hearing on government conferences and travel, I encourage you to find an appropriate balance between achieving savings to the taxpayers ensuring that federal employees can continue to serve the American people.

Each day, government workers travel throughout our country for legitimate activities. Whether it is a Bureau of Reclamation official inspecting the safety of a dam or a National Institutes of Health scientist delivering a presentation at a conference, by and large, government employees are committed public servants. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of government travel has been called into question as a result of the irresponsible decisions of a few bad actors.

In the wake of reports of the inappropriate use of taxpayer resources, the Obama Administration acted swiftly to prevent further abuse. The Office of Management and Budget reduced travel spending by 30 percent and required additional oversight and reporting for conferences expenses. These steps were a needed and measured approach to ensure that American taxpayer dollars are wisely utilized.

While I support strict scrutiny of government spending, I am concerned about the informal blacklisting of specific conference locations based solely on their perception as resort destinations. In my view, any decisions about government conferences or meetings should focus on providing the best value to the American taxpayer.

My home state of Nevada hosts more nationally recognized meetings and conventions than any other place in the country. In a time of tight budgets, Nevada offers a tremendous value

for both private and public sector meetings with modern conference facilities, thousands of hotel rooms, and easy transportation options.

Last year, more than 5 million people attended a convention, conference, or meeting in Las Vegas. Our world-class hotels and convention centers offer more than 10.5 million square feet of meeting space. Hotel rooms are affordable in both Las Vegas and Reno with average room rates that are up to 30 percent less than comparable destinations. Finally, Nevada's cities are easily connected to nearly every market in the country with hundreds of daily nonstop flights to our airports.

As the Committee conducts its hearing, I hope you will consider the value of in-person meetings and conferences in Nevada and across our nation. I look forward to learning about the effectiveness of the Administration's travel directives, as well as ways to ensure that legitimate travel is not negatively impacted by additional and unnecessary restrictions. Finally, I hope the Committee will agree that all travel and conference decisions should be based upon the value to the American taxpayer rather than the location in which an event is held.

I stand ready to assist your Committee as you work on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry Reid", written in a cursive style.

HARRY REID  
United States Senator  
Nevada



228 Little Creek Lane  
Jefferson City, MO 65109  
Tel: 1.800.787.2512  
Fax: 1.608.687.3993

January 17, 2014

Laura Kilbride  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
[laura\\_kilbride@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:laura_kilbride@hsgac.senate.gov)

Dear Ms. Kilbride,

It is vitally important for government agencies to travel if they are to assist organizations they are intended to serve. One simple example may clarify this point. 3RNet (National Rural Recruitment & Retention Network) is a non-profit agency serving the nation, whose mission is to improve rural and underserved communities' access to quality healthcare through the recruitment and retention of physicians and other healthcare professionals. In addition to having a job board, 3RNet focuses on networking and education.

3RNet conducts an annual conference attended by members from around the country. This is a critical opportunity to hear from our federal partners, receive updates, and learn about ever changing requirements. This past year our organization was denied that critical information because of the government shutdown, which prevented the National Health Service Corps, Office of Rural Health Policy, and two of our members - Veterans Affairs and Indian Health Service - from attending the conference and providing vital information to our members. If federal partners are not allowed to travel to the conference and share information, the educational and networking components cannot be adequately realized.

In addition, our organization has been encouraged by our federal partners to work on collaborating with other agencies as a way of working with reduced resources. If our federal partners cannot meet with us at least on an annual basis, then those who encourage collaboration are, in fact, denied the ability to practice it themselves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Shimmens".

Mike Shimmens  
Executive Director



Alan I. Leshner  
Chief Executive Officer and  
Executive Publisher, Science

January 28, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper

The Honorable Tom Coburn

Re: Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss conference and travel spending across the federal government. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world's largest multidisciplinary science society, representing the interests of ten million scientists worldwide, and publisher of the prestigious peer-reviewed journal *Science*.

We recognize that the government has a responsibility to prevent wasteful federal spending; however, it is also important to foster the exchange of scientific ideas that are so critical to innovation and national competitiveness. Accordingly, we would strongly oppose any language that would severely limit the number of conferences allowed to federal employees. We also believe that federal agencies should be consulted about the impact that additional reporting requirements (e.g., posting presentations) may have on national security, economic security and intellectual property before requiring that they be made publicly available. It is important that both branches of government work in partnership in order to avoid unintended negative consequences.

In February of last year, AAAS and 12 other scientific societies submitted a letter to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform detailing our collective thoughts on issues surrounding federal travel and meeting policies. In that letter we noted that "scientific, engineering and technological innovation is increasingly a joint effort between researchers from government, universities, industry, and other institutions." Professional conferences benefit all scientists, including federal researchers and their agencies, by exposing them to findings from their colleagues without having to wait for the findings to be published formally. We respectfully submit a copy of this [letter](#) for the record.

We stand ready to work with you as you address this subject.

Sincerely,

Alan I. Leshner

American Association for the Advancement of Science  
1200 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005 USA  
Tel: 202 326 6639 Fax: 202 371 9526  
E-mail: [aleshner@aaas.org](mailto:aleshner@aaas.org)

February 26, 2013

The Honorable Blake Farenthold  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, U.S. Postal Service and the Census  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6143

Dear Chairman Farenthold:

The undersigned U.S. science, engineering and higher education organizations write to share our thoughts with your committee as you oversee existing and proposed federal travel and meeting policies. We believe it is possible to provide effective oversight without adding to the administrative burden and expense or cutting off the participation of federal scientists and engineers at conferences. As this committee gives thoughtful consideration to how to accomplish the goals of increased transparency and accountability of government conference travel, the undersigned organizations welcome the opportunity to work with you.

Federal participation in scientific and technical conferences runs the gamut from small, specialty meetings targeted to specific areas of federal interest to broad disciplinary or multi-disciplinary conferences that offer access to tens of thousands of research papers and hundreds of sessions, many of which are concurrent. Meetings are often organized as venues for interaction between scientists and engineers across government agencies and laboratories working in areas of common interest. Conferences provide a variety of opportunities for federal agencies to advance their research missions in real and tangible ways:

- Scientific, engineering and technological innovation is increasingly a joint effort between researchers from government, universities, industry, and other institutions. Information exchange through scientific and technical conferences happens three times as fast as through published journals, leading to more rapid innovation. Professional conferences benefit federal researchers and their organizations by exposing them to findings from other institutions.
- It is critically important for federal scientists and engineers to know the top researchers in their fields personally and to be as current as possible on promising research directions. This is especially true when they are responsible for funding research outside their agencies or for gathering information on worldwide breakthroughs.
- Many federal program managers use technical conferences as opportunities to engage with a wide collection of researchers for peer review, program reviews and future program planning, and to efficiently examine a large collection of independent research projects. Because the alternative is multiple visits to individual research laboratories, this approach represents a significant savings of both cost and time.
- Federal researchers and program managers who participate in formal talks, symposia and poster presentations associated with conferences are exposed to thought-provoking questions and comments from fellow researchers and are engaged in informal conversations that may continue

long after the conference or meeting. Such interactions foster productive collaborations and accelerate and improve the work of federal researchers and funders.

- Many science and technology conferences provide undergraduate and graduate students with an opportunity to present their research through poster sessions, allowing federal researchers and program managers an opportunity to recruit prospective researchers.

As a community, we recognize that the government has a responsibility to prevent wasteful government spending and that the existing policy governing travel was developed to achieve that end. However, uncertainties on how to implement these policies have led to unintended consequences and have negatively impacted participation by federal scientists and engineers in science and technology conferences. This impedes the dissemination of research that results in useful innovation and will have adverse, long-term consequences on our national competitiveness.

We appreciate that the current policies were created with the intention of carefully reviewing public expenditures allocated for travel and meetings. However, in addition to limiting the benefits derived from federally funded research, policy-makers should take into consideration that new accounting and reporting policies will also add to the administrative costs of travel and conferences.

The science and engineering research community understands that fiscal constraints are currently forcing agencies to administer travel budgets more stringently. We support efforts by Congress and the Administration to ensure the transparency and accountability of federal expenditures. Opportunities such as the hearing before the House Government Reform and Oversight committee provide a mechanism for understanding the positive and negative consequences of new oversight endeavors. With that in mind, we encourage you to reach out to stakeholders in the science, engineering and higher education community as you carefully consider oversight policies.

For further information from representatives of this community, please do not hesitate to contact Joanne Carney of AAAS at [jcarney@aaas.org](mailto:jcarney@aaas.org) or 202-326-6431, or Ray Garant of ACS at [r\\_garant@acs.org](mailto:r_garant@acs.org) or 202-872-6063.

American Association for the Advancement of Science  
 American Chemical Society  
 American Geophysical Union  
 American Physical Society  
 Computing Research Association  
 Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology  
 IEEE-USA  
 Materials Research Society  
 SPIE - The International Society for Optics and Photonics  
 The Alliance for Science & Technology Research in America  
 The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics  
 The Optical Society  
 U.S. Public Policy Council of the Association for Computing Machinery

copy: The Honorable Stephen Lynch, Subcommittee Ranking Member  
 The Honorable Rush Holt, U.S. House of Representatives (NJ-12)



January 29, 2014

The Honorable Tom Carper  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Homeland  
Security & Governmental Affairs  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Homeland  
Security & Governmental Affairs  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

On behalf of the 3,500 individual and 44 institutional members of the American Association for Dental Research (AADR), which is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing research and increasing knowledge for the improvement of oral health, I am pleased to submit a statement for the record on the hearing entitled *Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government*.

AADR hosts an annual conference attracting 4,000 to 6,000 participants. These conferences provide a forum for dental, oral and craniofacial researchers from around the world to share, connect and learn more about the latest dental and craniofacial research findings. Each year AADR invites federal researchers from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) to participate in our conference. Their booth is a major draw for conference participants who wish to meet in person with program officers regarding potential grant applications and research career advice. In turn, NIDCR scientists stay on the cutting edge of research by participating in our many symposia, workshops, and oral and poster sessions, and by networking with scientists in academia and private industry.

Unfortunately, in 2013 due to recent restrictions on travel and conference participation and sequestration, NIDCR cancelled the registrations of 32 participants and their booth presence at the AADR meeting. In 2014, 22 NIDCR staff will be unable to attend our conference. This represents a missed opportunity for NIDCR and our members to share information and engage with leading dental, oral and craniofacial researchers.

AADR recognizes that oversight and curtailing of funding for government spending on conferences was needed after the blatant abuse by some of the federal agencies. However, we remain concerned that some provisions included in the *Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2013* (H.R. 2061) and the *Conference Accountability Act of 2013* (S. 1347) are unduly restrictive and could ultimately result in dissuading or preventing federal participation in the AADR annual conference and other educational meetings. These provisions would not only place an additional administrative burden on federal agencies, but they would potentially require the disclosure of some private and proprietary information on websites.

Furthermore, S. 1347 restricts agencies to expend funds on not more than one conference per year. In this legislation conference is defined as a meeting that is held for consultation, education or discussion. Given the broad definition, federal agencies could significantly limit participation in not only major conferences but informal educational meetings that occur frequently among staff, members and federal employees.

1619 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3406, USA  
T +1.703.548.0066 • F +1.703.548.1883  
[www.aadronline.org](http://www.aadronline.org)

*Chairman Carper Ranking Member Coburn*  
*January 29, 2014*  
*Page 2*

In closing, conference calls and webinars cannot substitute face-to-face interactions, live scientific poster presentations, interactive hands-on-workshops and scientific symposia held at our meetings that allow collaborative research. Meetings with federal agencies are critical to the work and mission of AADR. More importantly, federally-employed scientists will be at a distinct disadvantage compared to scientists in the private sector or employed in other countries. Accordingly, I strongly urge you to consider the ramifications of expanding restrictions on conference and travel expenditures beyond the actions already taken by the Office of Management and Budget. Further restricting government travel and conference participation will undoubtedly impact the opportunities to learn and exchange information, which will in turn impact potential advances in oral health research.

Sincerely,



Christopher H. Fox, DMD, DMSc  
Executive Director  
American Association for Dental Research

Testimony of Lauren G. Gross, J.D., on behalf of  
The American Association of Immunologists (AAI)

Submitted to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
for the Hearing Record of January 14, 2014:  
“Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government”

[Lauren G. Gross, J.D., (301) 634-7178; [lgross@aai.org](mailto:lgross@aai.org)]

The American Association of Immunologists (AAI) (see <http://www.aai.org/>), the world’s largest professional association of research scientists and physicians who are experts on the immune system, respectfully submits this testimony regarding federal spending on conferences and travel. AAI appreciates that the Committee is examining this important issue and has invited testimony from interested parties for submission into the hearing record of January 14, 2014 (“Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government”).

As a professional society, AAI holds an annual scientific meeting “which brings ... together world leaders in immunology to present their research in lectures and ... symposia. AAI also invites investigators at every career stage to submit abstracts reporting their latest scientific findings in oral and poster sessions.” (<http://www.aai.org/Meetings/index.html>) The AAI annual meeting is the largest annual scientific meeting in the world devoted solely to immunology; its size (more than 3,000 scientific attendees) and program breadth (more than 650 scientific lectures and talks, and over 1,700 poster presentations, on 22 topic areas) expose scientists not only to cutting edge advances in their own areas of expertise but also to areas beyond their subspecialties that could be important to their current work. The meeting also offers invaluable sessions devoted to scientific publication, career development, and government policies affecting biomedical research; and provides scientists at every stage and from all around the world with the opportunity to meet, exchange ideas, discuss existing or potential collaborations, and learn from one another.

As part of its educational mission, AAI also offers two, 6-day-long courses in immunology.

- The Introductory Course in Immunology, which will be held in Long Beach, California, in 2014, “is an intensive two-part course, taught by world-renowned immunologists, which provides a comprehensive overview of the basics of immunology.” (<http://www.aai.org/Education/Courses/index.html>)
- The Advanced Course in Immunology, which will be held in Boston, Massachusetts, in 2014, “is an intensive course directed toward advanced trainees and scientists who wish to expand or update their understanding of the field.” (<http://www.aai.org/Education/Courses/index.html>)

The AAI annual meeting and courses are open to all scientists, and scientists employed by the federal government - and particularly by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) - have historically participated fully in these activities, both as speakers and attendees. Recent policy changes within the federal government have threatened this important and ongoing participation. AAI is deeply concerned - on behalf of our members who are government employees and those who are not

but who collaborate, learn from, and depend on the scientific and program leadership of their government colleagues - that unless policy changes are implemented, the quality and value of our meetings and courses, and much more importantly, the advancement of our scientific discipline, will suffer real and irreparable harm.

#### **Current federal policy**

In May of 2012, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidelines that mandated a 30% reduction (from 2010) in federal agency travel budgets. (*Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-12-12 dated May 11, 2012*;

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2012/m-12-12.pdf>)

In response, each federal agency issued rules governing its own conference and travel spending. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) subsequently issued rules requiring, among other things, approval by the HHS Deputy Secretary of all travel to meetings where the “[t]otal expense by an individual OPDIV or STAFFDIV... [or the] [t]otal expense to HHS (for two or more OPDIVs and STAFFDIVs) ... [is] estimated [to be] in excess of \$75,000.” (<http://www.hhs.gov/asfr/ogapa/acquisition/policies/appropriated-funds-use-for-conferences-meeting-space-6-24-2013.html>)

In the Omnibus Appropriations Acts of 2013 and 2014, Congress requires agencies to submit annual reports “regarding the costs and contracting procedures related to each conference held by any such department, agency, board, commission, or office during [the relevant] fiscal year ... for which the cost to the United States Government was more than \$100,000” and to comply with the “Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-12-12 dated May 11, 2012.” See “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014,” Section 742 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr3547enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr3547enr.pdf>); and “Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013,” Section 3003 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr933enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr933enr.pdf>).

#### **Impact of current federal policy on government scientists**

AAI understands that these rules were promulgated in an effort to prevent excessive or unnecessary government spending and to prevent abuses, such as happened in recent scandals which were widely publicized. We support the prudent use of taxpayer funds and appreciate the apparent intent of the rules.

Nevertheless, AAI believes that, particularly in their implementation, the rules have had an unintended and deleterious effect; among other things (as described above), the rules have made government scientists feel cut off from the rest of the scientific community, wreaked havoc with their ability to fulfill professional commitments, and undermined the morale of some of the government’s finest minds. And importantly, the rules impede the opportunity for federal scientists to appear on podiums worldwide, demonstrating to taxpayers (and the international community) the value of U.S. government investment in biomedical research. It may be of concern to the Committee that at the AAI annual meeting in 2013, South Korea had more scientists in attendance than the United States federal government.

Scientists at the NIH must submit every request to travel to a meeting to NIH and HHS administrators. AAI understands that NIH scientists are even more frustrated with what they perceive as an inefficient system that requires requests be submitted many months in advance but are approved only at the last minute. AAI has been told that travel to our 2013 annual meeting (IMMUNOLOGY 2013™ in May 2013) was approved for NIH staff and trainees less than 48 hours before the start of the meeting, causing massive disruption for those planning to attend and/or give presentations with a number of people canceling their trips. Many government scientists who are invited to speak at or attend a meeting that is only 3-4 months away decline the invitation because there is insufficient time to get approval to attend. This clearly undermines NIH's ability to fulfill its mission to share ongoing NIH research with the rest of the scientific community. In addition, at least one NIH institute has implemented a rule that requires each lab to pay for travel out of its own budget if the cost of travel is less than \$500.00, even if a sponsor is willing to cover the full cost. The institute apparently reasons that because it costs more than \$500.00 to process the paperwork, it is more cost-effective for each lab to pay the cost. However, we understand that this has negatively impacted the ability of scientists to travel since shrinking budgets have made labs and investigators less willing and able to absorb such costs.

#### **Impact on interaction between federal government and its grantees**

It is essential for program officers and other scientist-administrators at federal funding agencies to have the opportunity to meet and share information with existing and potential grantees. At scientific meetings and conferences, these federal leaders have formal and informal opportunities to discuss – and solicit input on – the scientific and policy agenda of their agency, and to learn about the needs of the stakeholders they serve. These interactions also assist government employees who are charged with overseeing federal research portfolios and expenditures. The current travel rules are impeding the ability of government employees to fulfill their mission.

#### **Additional costs to federal government**

There are significant additional costs to the government associated with the current travel policy of which the Committee should be aware:

1. Because agency approval to attend is required before a government scientist can register for a meeting, government scientists may not be able to take advantage of early registration discounts. For the AAI annual meeting, this is a significant cost: regular (non-graduate student) attendees who register about six weeks or more before the meeting save \$145.00 over the full registration cost; graduate student members who register early save \$75.00 (non-members save \$70.00).
2. Late approval to attend can also result in federal employees finding that hotels with the discounted rates that have been negotiated for a meeting have sold out, or that the less expensive hotel accommodations have already been booked. Unless federal employees awaiting travel approval make hotel reservations early, they may have no choice but to stay at hotels that are further away from the meeting site, more expensive, or both.
3. While government employees await approval for travel, airfares often increase. Although federal employees are eligible for government contract airfare, which is convenient, flexible, and fully refundable, it can be expensive. In an effort to preserve their limited budgets, some federal scientists try to purchase less expensive, non-refundable tickets. To purchase such a

ticket, the government requires that there be a significant cost savings (more than 40% for domestic and non-foreign fares and more than 15% for international fares) to the government. (See [http://www.hhs.gov/travel/policies/2012\\_policy\\_manual.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/travel/policies/2012_policy_manual.pdf)) With the delay in approval, it is much harder for employees to find such savings; one federal scientist reports that his airfare increased, on more than one occasion, by over \$300 because of the delay and eventual rise in the cost of non-refundable fares.

### Conclusion

AAI has been concerned about the federal travel policy and related legislation for some time, and has expressed this concern in letters to Congressional leaders and in testimony to the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS), regarding the fiscal year (FY) 2013 and FY 2014 appropriations bills. On March 29, 2012, AAI said the following in testimony to the House Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee:

*"Government scientists are valued members of our organization and contribute significantly to scientific advancement in the field. It is as important to AAI to have them attend our meetings as it is for them to attend. Dialogue and information exchange among scientists from government, academia, industry and private institutes is absolutely essential, and any barriers to the participation of government scientists undermines [sic] the best interests of science."*  
([http://aai.org/Public\\_Affairs/Docs/2012/AAI\\_FY2013\\_Roopenian\\_House\\_2012-03-29.pdf](http://aai.org/Public_Affairs/Docs/2012/AAI_FY2013_Roopenian_House_2012-03-29.pdf))

In conclusion, we urge the members of this Committee and of the Congress to work with the scientific community to ensure that federally employed scientists are permitted to participate fully in the collaborative and educational activities that advance the scientific enterprise. AAI thanks the Committee for its interest in this matter and for considering the views of AAI.



American College of  
Healthcare Executives  
*for leaders who care®*

One North Franklin Street  
Suite 1700  
Chicago, Illinois 60606-3529  
(312) 424-2800 Phone  
(312) 424-0023 Fax  
ache@ache.org

January 28, 2014

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending  
Across the Federal Government"

The American College of Healthcare Executives is an individual membership organization of more than 40,000 healthcare executives who lead hospitals, healthcare systems and other healthcare organizations in both the private and public sectors. Our members serve patients and communities across the United States and around the globe. We provide valuable resources to support our members in their dedication to improving healthcare delivery and the quality and cost-efficiency of healthcare.

We believe it is critical for federal employees to participate in association conferences to learn the latest healthcare trends and strategies. It is this kind of education that stimulates ideas and contributes to effective decision making. Association meetings also provide an opportunity for federal employees to interact with private-sector leaders to create meaningful dialogue around best practices and policy matters. Together, private and public sector healthcare leaders can anticipate challenges and identify solutions for healthcare's greatest transformation.

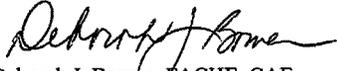
ACHE's Congress on Healthcare Leadership—an annual education program held in Chicago that draws more than 4,000 attendees—is the largest gathering of healthcare leaders in the world. Prior to 2013, four percent of Congress participants were employed by the VA, and 5 percent were members of the uniformed services. In addition to accessing relevant, high-quality continuing education, federal employees from various sectors came together at Congress for special activities such as the Joint Federal Sector Morning Program and Awards and the Joint Federal Healthcare Session. Unfortunately, in 2013 more than 800 federal employees missed these opportunities.

In addition, federal employees are active participants in ACHE's certification program, earning and maintaining board certification in healthcare management in part through attendance at face-to-face education offerings. Board certification as an ACHE Fellow advances the individual's professional development and benefits the agency and, ultimately, the public programs he or she administers.

We urge caution on legislative proposals, that while well intentioned, would have unintended consequences of limiting the kinds of meetings and information exchange that is in the best interest of everyone. We also caution Congress and the Administration to not—intentionally or inadvertently—wholly restrict federal employees from attending association meetings and conferences.

I request that these comments in support of federal employees being able to participate in association meetings and conferences be included in the record. I would be happy to serve as a resource, sharing why meeting attendance fosters the kind of collaboration between public and private sector healthcare leaders that is essential to improving the quality and cost-efficiency of healthcare delivery. You can reach me at (312) 424-9493 or [dbowen@ache.org](mailto:dbowen@ache.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah J. Bowen". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Deborah J. Bowen, FACHE, CAE  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
American College of Healthcare Executives



703.525.0511  
703.525.0743  
info@acmanet.org

3033 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 420  
Arlington, VA 22201  
www.acmanet.org

## Statement for the Hearing on Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
January 14, 2014

The American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA) strongly believes restrictions on travel by federal government employees to industry, technical and educational conferences will have a profound negative impact on our nation's competitiveness.

ACMA represents some 3,000 primarily smaller U.S. companies making products using fiber reinforced polymer composites. These are technically sophisticated products with advanced properties that make them suitable for solving a number of pressing challenges such building a sustainable infrastructure, generating renewable energy, improving fuel economy of cars and trucks, and preventing pollution.

The federal government plays an important facilitating and often leadership role in advancing the ability of our industry to cost effectively contribute to these national priorities and furthering the policies set by Congress and the Administration. This kind of facilitation and leadership could not occur if federal government employees were unable to travel to industry conferences and technical events, and contribute to essential information interchange with manufacturers, material suppliers, end-users and specifiers, state and local governments, and academics.

ACMA together with the Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering (SAMPE) will in October launch the Composites and Advanced Materials Expo (CAMX), which is designed to be the premier national event for education, networking and technical information exchange for the composites industry. Many federal government employees – who play critical roles in furthering policy goals at DOT, DOE, EPA, DOD, NIST and other agencies – will be hampered in their missions if arbitrary and counterproductive travel restrictions make it impossible for them to join 8,500 other composites industry professionals at this event.

The Energy Department in particular has an ongoing interest in composites, recently hosting for example workshops on improving the availability of carbon fiber reinforcement, and on advancing technical developments for composites manufacturing.

ACMA encourages the Committee to recognize the essential contribution by federal government employees at technical and industry conferences, and to support our nation's competitiveness by allowing them to travel to these events.

- # - # -

YOUR VOICE. YOUR RESOURCE. YOUR ASSOCIATION.





AMERICAN COLLEGE  
OF RHEUMATOLOGY  
EDUCATION • TREATMENT • RESEARCH

Specialists in Arthritis Care & Research

2200 Lake Boulevard NE • Atlanta, GA 30319-5312  
Phone: (404) 633-3777 • Fax: (404) 633-1870  
www.rheumatology.org • info@rheumatology.org

January 3, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairwoman, Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
503 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Travel Restrictions Placed on Employees of NIH and other Federally-Employed Scientists

Dear Senator Mikulski,

On behalf of the American College of Rheumatology, I am writing to you about an area of significant concern regarding the National Institutes of Health. Since the implementation of the Budget Control Act of 2011, travel restrictions places on employees of NIH and other federally employed scientists have begun to threaten the integrity of scientific meetings planned by, among others, the American College of Rheumatology.

The ACR is very concerned that codified restrictions on government employee travel in the Budget Control Act of 2011 have led to overly restrictive enforcement and resulted in denial and disruption of travel to scientific meetings for hundreds of government scientists, physicians, and grants administrators, whose presence at our meetings is critical for scientific interchange and dissemination of new knowledge that will help patients suffering from rheumatic diseases. We certainly understand and respect the genesis of these restrictions in the wake of much publicized problems at GSA and other government agencies.

We agree in principle, as a cooperative partner with our federal government, that all use of taxpayer funds need to be transparent and closely monitored. We believe however that the restrictions could be applied in a more effective and judicious way than currently permitted by law.

As the Budget Control Act provisions come up for renewal, we hope you will consider the following factors:

- Many ACR meetings, including our Annual Scientific Meeting are funded in part by NIH through U-grant mechanisms.
- Our Annual Scientific Meeting is the premier meeting internationally and provides the best exposure to the most advanced science in our field, including science presented by, and funded by the NIH.
- NIH is training numerous fellows in training who take advantage of the collaborative atmosphere of the meetings to further their training and develop new areas for future work.
- **The absence of NIH or other federally funded scientists at our meetings diminishes their integrity, limits the potential growth of science in our field, and threatens the collaborations which have lead to many recent advances.**

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
NIH Travel Restrictions  
January 3, 2014  
Page 2

We therefore are asking for your support during this budgeting cycle to ease restrictions by, at the very least, **exempting federally employed scientists who are attending academic or scientific conferences, from further travel restrictions.**

Specifically, the ACR suggests that OMB policy on Use of Appropriated Funds for Conferences and Meeting Space be allowed to revert to guidance that can be adhered to through HHS procedures already in place.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and for your attention to this important issue. For questions please contact Adam Cooper, Senior Director of Government Affairs, at (404) 633-3777 or [acooper@rheumatology.org](mailto:acooper@rheumatology.org).

Sincerely,



William F. Harvey, MD, MSc  
Chair, Government Affairs Committee  
American College of Rheumatology



## American Chemical Society

## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Tom Barton, Ph.D.  
President-Elect, 2013  
President, 2014  
Immediate Past President, 2015

1155 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036  
Phone 202-872-4461  
Fax 202-872-6338

January 27, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chair  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs  
United States Senate  
513 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-0803

The Honorable Thomas A. Coburn  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs  
United States Senate  
172 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-3604

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

I am writing on behalf of the American Chemical Society (ACS) to offer our views and thoughts pertaining to the importance of permitting federal scientists, engineers and technical personnel to attend and participate in scientific meetings and conferences. This was the subject of a hearing the Committee held on January 14, 2014, and ACS would like to submit its comments for the record.

As the Committee considers federal travel expenditures and their associated guidelines, the Society urges consideration of the negative impact of restricting federal employees' ability to attend scientific meeting and conferences.

Scientific meetings provide U.S. scientists and researchers the opportunity to advance their education and professional development. The relationships built between attendees from government, academia, and the private sector facilitate dialogue that cannot easily be replicated in other environments. In order for federal scientists to remain on the cutting edge of scientific innovation and provide the government with the expertise it depends upon, they must be part of this broader scientific community. Limiting federal employees' attendance at non-governmental meetings would remove scientists from the community and be a detriment to the development of sound policymaking. It would also hinder the nation's innovation infrastructure that is a key component of job creation, economic growth and our nation's global competitiveness.

ACS is a nonprofit organization chartered by the U.S. Congress. Since its creation in 1876, the ACS has grown to be the world's largest scientific society and a leading source of authoritative scientific information. With more than 160,000 members, ACS is committed to improving people's lives through the transforming power of chemistry.

Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn  
January 27, 2014

2

ACS annually hosts two national meetings and expositions that attract 11,000 to 17,000 chemists, engineers, academicians, students, and other related professionals. Each meeting features more than 7,000 presentations organized into technical symposia and short courses that provide educational and professional development opportunities for attendees. Additionally, ACS organizes six to eight regional meetings and six to 10 specialty meetings each year to address the diverse professional interests and geographic regions of our members. This collection of meetings provides scientists the ability to remain at the forefront of scientific discovery and return to their respective places of employment armed with greater resources to benefit our innovation-based economy.

With an average of 750 federal employees attending ACS national meetings to network with their non-federal peers, the Society is concerned about the effect that significant limitations will have on both the federal government's scientific expertise and the world leadership position of U.S. science and technology. In an era of tight budgets ACS respects the need to responsibly control federal spending, but fears that overly austere travel and meeting strictures could limit the ability of government employees to participate in valuable educational and professional development opportunities at scientific meetings.

The White House Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum in May 2012 that set new meeting and travel guidelines for federal agencies, largely sparked by the Las Vegas conference scandal of the General Services Administration. ACS and many other scientific, engineering and technical societies expressed great concern to OMB and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) that the new guidelines could have a chilling impact on the ability of federal scientists to attend scientific meetings and conferences. Both OMB and OSTP acknowledged this potential, and in May 2013, the U.S. Chief Financial Officers Council issued a Controller Alert that permitted greater flexibility for agency personnel to attend scientific meetings. ACS respectfully requests that this flexibility be considered in any potential legislation drafted to address government travel and meeting attendance matters.

Thank you for considering the input of the ACS on this important matter. If you, or your staff, would like to discuss matter further, please do not hesitate to contact Glenn Ruskin, Director, ACS Office of Public Affairs at (202) 872-4386 or [g\\_ruskin@acs.org](mailto:g_ruskin@acs.org).

Sincerely,



Tom Barton, Ph.D.  
President



American Society of Agronomy • Crop Science Society of America • Soil Science Society of America

5585 Guilford Road, Madison WI 53711-5801 • Tel. 608-273-8080 • Fax 608-273-2021  
www.agronomy.org • www.crops.org • www.soils.org

January 23, 2014

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Re: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), represent over 18,000 members in academia, industry, and government, 12,500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), and 781 Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS), as the largest coalition of professionals dedicated to the agronomic, crop and soil science disciplines in the United States. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are dedicated to developing innovative, science-based solutions to meet our growing food, fuel, feed, and fiber needs.

As you examine the issue of internal federal conferences and the progress made on oversight, we ask that you note the differences between government conferences and association conferences. Scientific and technical association meetings are an essential venue for scientific discussion, debate, collaboration and exchange that are fundamental to the conduct of science. Public-private scientific collaboration relies on this face-to-face exchange of knowledge and ideas. In 2013, our annual meeting provided opportunities for dialogue around important issues facing agriculture for over 4000 attendees from the academic, federal, and industry research sectors.

We recognize the importance of utilizing technology to help reduce cost for all conference participants. After the conclusion of our annual meeting, over 3000 presentations are loaded to our Digital Library, a complete collection of all content published by all three societies. CCA and CPSS maintain certification status by attaining a minimum requirement of 40 Continuing Education Units every two years either through online distance education technologies or at board approve educational events.

Remote access to meetings and educational events cannot replace knowledge gained from personal interactions. Innovation happens when experts across all sectors and different disciplines come together to discuss and collaborate. Our members often comment how serendipitous encounters lead to significant working relationships and enhance professional growth and development.

We urge caution on legislative proposals, that while well intentioned, would have unintended consequences of limiting the kinds of meetings and information exchange that benefit the United States competitiveness globally. We also caution Congress and the Obama Administration to not, intentionally

or inadvertently, wholly restrict federal employees from attending scientific conferences and educational events.

Thank you for your consideration. For additional information please contact Karl Anderson, Director of Government Relations, at [kanderson@sciencesocieties.org](mailto:kanderson@sciencesocieties.org) or 202-408-5382.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen Bergfeld". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ellen" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bergfeld".

Dr. Ellen Bergfeld, CEO  
American Society of Agronomy  
Crop Science Society of America  
Soil Science Society of America

**Statement of**  
**The Associated General Contractors of America**  
**to the**  
**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
**U.S. Senate**  
**For a hearing on**  
**“Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the**  
**Federal Government”**

**January 14, 2014**

**AGC of America**  
THE ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA



Quality People. Quality Projects.

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) is the largest and oldest national construction trade association in the United States. AGC represents more than 25,000 firms, including America's leading general contractors and specialty-contracting firms. Many of the nation's service providers and suppliers are associated with AGC through a nationwide network of chapters. AGC contractors are engaged in the construction of the nation's commercial buildings, shopping centers, factories, warehouses, highways, bridges, tunnels, airports, waterworks facilities, waste treatment facilities, dams, water conservation projects, defense facilities, multi-family housing projects, site preparation/utilities installation for housing development, and more.

THE ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA  
2300 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 400 • Arlington, VA 22201 • Phone: (703) 548-3118 • FAX: (703) 548-3119

**The Associated General Contractors of America  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
January 14, 2014**

Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn, thank you for inviting the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) to submit testimony for your hearing on conference and travel spending across the federal government. Given a time when the national debt and deficit remain high, the federal government should consider sensible and reasonable cost-savings measures. For example, a recent congressional report predicts that estimated savings from reductions in federal government conference spending could reach as high as \$500 million annually. At first glance, many may laud this figure. However, this figure alone does not reveal the true federal conference spending problem and the many unintended and negative consequences such cuts have had on:

- 1- Stakeholder and government partnership in areas like construction, where private industry builds and maintains the infrastructure and facilities the federal government needs to protect and house America's soldiers, heal America's veterans, transport American goods and services and secure American cities and towns from natural disasters;
- 2- Stakeholder and government communication that is essential for establishing, implementing and administering reasonable policies and regulations of stakeholders; and
- 3- The ability of federal agencies to reach out to small businesses.

**Government Conferences Are the Problem, Not Stakeholder Conferences with Government**

In April 2012, a General Services Administration (GSA) inspector general report revealed that excessive and wasteful spending occurred as the result of a 2010 conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. The report detailed that expenses included: eight pre-conference planning trips to Las Vegas costing \$136,000, a clown, a mind reader, t-shirts, a \$75,000 training exercise to build a bicycle and \$6,000 for commemorative coins, a \$44 per person breakfast, \$57 per person lunch and \$95 per person dinners. News of this event led to congressional oversight that uncovered dozens of examples of wasteful spending at agency-only conferences, including those within the Department of Veterans Affairs, Internal Revenue Service and Department of Defense.

However, in all of these cases, the issue of wasteful federal employee travel and conference spending originated from internal, government-only conferences. Given this fact, agencies' reasonably reduced excessive and wasteful spending, like lavish meals and entertainment, at such government-only conferences. In addition, agencies began to reevaluate the purpose, structure and value of government-only meetings.

That stated, the resulting reaction to these government-only conferences has unfortunately bled over to essential stakeholder conferences with government, jeopardizing reasonable federal government policies and regulations, effective stakeholder and federal government partnerships

and small business outreach. Agencies now require federal employees to obtain approval from unreasonably high level authorities for any conference travel, i.e., requiring a civilian employee to receive such approval from a three-star general. In addition, such approvals often require the employee to complete over burdensome and unnecessary paperwork to justify conference attendance and travel.

In AGC's recent experience, the combination of these two hurdles have severely reduced agency participation at meetings with construction industry stakeholders. Few if any agency representatives now travel beyond Washington, D.C., to hear about and discuss agency construction needs, policies and regulations impacting the construction industry. The rare few that can attend spend days completing paperwork and awaiting others to review that paperwork, which needlessly wastes government time and resources. As such, AGC fears the reduced communication between the construction contractor community and federal agencies may engender a less effective partnership between the agencies that build projects and the contractors with whom they hire that could jeopardize efficient and effective project delivery.

#### **Productive & Essential Stakeholder/Government Partnership at Risk**

Discussions between construction contractors and federal employees at conferences are mission-critical to construction procurement agencies within many military and civilian agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), Air Force Center for Engineering and the Environment (AFCEE), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and GSA, among others. Though these procurement agencies may have the capability to self-perform limited and small construction services work, they do not have the ability to do so for all construction services work. For example, they do not have the capability to complete any significant construction projects using their own internal resources. As such, these agencies contract work to many AGC's members who build flood control projects, barracks, locks, dams, office buildings, and hospitals as well as dredge waterways and harbors.

As a commander maintains open communication with its soldiers in the field, AGC contends that federal agencies' maintaining regular and open communication with AGC contractors who perform their work is essential to ensuring construction projects are successfully completed. A federal construction project often includes a general contractor, architects, engineers, laborers, specialty subcontractors, an agency overseeing construction, an agency client for which the facility will house, and the opinion of other non-construction stakeholders. The federal agency overseeing project execution has a lot of interests to balance, but only has a direct contractual relationship with the general contractor. Through what is known as the partnering process, federal agencies try to regularly communicate with general contractors and vice versa. These communications are generally made at industry meetings that AGC holds, which have seen either dismal or no federal agency attendance recently.

Both the national AGC and many of its 94 Chapters in the U.S. hold meetings with federal agencies throughout the nation. The meetings provide both contractors and federal officials with valuable insight about the situation in the field and how to improve it. These conferences provide contractors and federal officials with open forums on neutral grounds to discuss future and ongoing projects as well as lessons learned from completed ones.

The conferences allow a significant and essential cross section of federal agency employees to meet with their construction contractor partners not only in Washington, D.C., but also throughout the nation. Federal construction procurement agencies generally have regional offices that oversee projects within their jurisdictions. Many AGC Chapters and their members in various regions hold meetings where numerous DoD officials and regionally-based contractors attend. Allowing for the free flow of information at these meetings in Atlanta, Omaha, Seattle, and across the country enables the boarder regional procurement offices to meet together with contractors. The involvement of contracting officers, engineers and architects as well as senior executive service officers is critical. Many of these rank-in-file federal employees with key roles in the construction process would otherwise not have any meaningful contact with the industry with whom they work to learn how to correct mistakes or about new construction trends.

Information included in a memorandum is no substitute for in-person exchanges of ideas. AGC strongly contends that valuable ideas expressed and exchanged in these in-person meetings are more likely to be heard and understood by both parties than through any other form of communication. Paper can be thrown away or misplaced; emails could go unopened or forgotten; but a face-to-face, open discussion on important issues is more likely to help advance the mission than any other form of communication.

The a prime example of an agency and AGC Chapter partnership in jeopardy is that between the USACE Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) and the Mississippi Valley Branch, AGC (MVAGC). The MVAGC is the primary construction partner for the MVD in executing its civil works construction program, whose portfolio included navigating among the greatest floods in 2011 and droughts in 2012 along the Mississippi River. The MVAGC Annual Meeting attracts potential bidders, helping to drive up competition and lower prices, on civil works projects and allows for discussion on safety issues. Thus, the partnering derived from this conference helps ensure that critical Corps' projects in the region receive viable and competitive bids and are safely constructed within mission timeframes.

#### **Regulators Should Not Regulate from the Ivory Tower**

Federal agency construction policies, procedures or regulations are not always perfect. What may be written in an office in Washington, D.C., may not translate correctly to construction sites in St. Louis, Anchorage or Miami. However, those who right these policies may not realize that an error occurred or an improvement can be made until they hear directly from contractors.

By constraining the ability of federal employees to travel, those employees are less likely to hear about how the decisions they make actually impact the construction industry with which they work. Many would agree that what one learns in a book is no substitute from real life experience. If a federal employee does not hear about, understand or experience the real life results of a decision he or she made, it could significantly impact the industry for years to come.

#### **Small Businesses Outreach Diminished**

AGC represents over 25,000 companies in the construction industry. About 80 percent of those firms represent small businesses of 20 or fewer employees. Many of these small business firms would attend local and regional meetings held by AGC Chapters to hear and learn about federal construction trends and the marketplace. However, as agencies' ability to meet outside of Washington, D.C., diminishes so has small business outreach.

Many small construction businesses cannot afford to come to Washington to hear about the latest trends and potential market opportunities. Many of these businesses do not have a significant business development fund, let alone a single employee in charge of such endeavors, to travel to Washington. Their only ability to hear from agencies comes from their ability to attend local and regional meetings that agencies would traditionally attend.

The reduction in federal agency travel to stakeholder meetings has diminished a prime mission of the federal government to encourage and grow small businesses by eliminating many outreach opportunities at these meetings. In addition, federal agencies lose a significant resource to obtaining small business feedback on policies, regulations and operations.

### **Conclusion**

The primary purpose of conferences with AGC contractors and federal agencies is to help ensure the successful execution of construction projects critical to those agencies' missions. These meetings provide an opportunity for contractors and federal employees alike to discuss a range of construction issues, from project delivery to safety.

The prohibition and hindrance of federal representatives' attendance at such conferences, for the reasons noted above, have only served to help undermine partnering efforts and drastically reduce a positive and productive line of communication on agency policies impacting the construction industry.

As such, AGC strongly urges Congress to reconsider the slash-and-burn take on federal travel spending for non-government conferences. While such a policy has proven penny wise, for the reasons articulated above, AGC contends it is pound foolish.



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED BY**

**THE AMERICAN HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION**

**BEFORE**

**THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**"Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"**

**ROOM SD-342, DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
JANUARY 14, 2014**

On behalf of the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA), the sole national association representing all sectors and stakeholders in the U.S. lodging industry, including owners, REITs, chains, franchisees, management companies, independent properties, suppliers, and state associations, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record in relation to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs' January 14, 2014 hearing, "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government". We appreciate the Committee's attention to this important issue.

As an integral part of the travel and tourism industry in this country, lodging is one of the nation's largest export industries and one of our largest employers. With 1.8 million employees in cities and towns across the country, the hotel industry generates \$155.5 billion in annual sales from 4.9 million guestrooms at 52,529 properties. It's particularly important to note that this industry is comprised largely of small businesses, with more than 55% of hotels made up of 75 rooms or less.

Our industry's strong growth, sales, and employment base are key reasons that lodging has led the nation's economic recovery with 14 straight quarters of growth. The lodging industry is a valuable contributor to the local and national economy, creating well-paying jobs and career opportunities for millions of people. Hoteliers strive each day to make sure those opportunities continue to grow.

We appreciate the Committee's interest in reviewing progress made by federal agencies to control costs related to travel. Increased scrutiny of federal travel and resulting limitations began shortly after the Inspector General of the General Services Administration (GSA) in 2012 released a report providing details of an excessive 2010 employee conference. Following the release of the study and on the heels of a directive from the White House, in May 2012 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) required each federal agency to reduce travel by 30 percent of FY 2010 levels through FY 2016. Further, OMB required increased oversight of all conference-related spending and employee travel generally. These changes in policy resulted in widespread cancellations and a reduction of more than \$2 billion in federal travel spending. Consequently, there was a significant negative impact on the bottom line of hotels and facilities hosting these events.

While we agree that wasteful spending in travel should be addressed, we believe a balance needs to be achieved that increases accountability in government spending without the imposition of across-the-board, arbitrary, sequester-like punishment (i.e., budget caps). Further, as is the case with all business travel, legitimate agency meetings and conferences that provide critical face-to-face interaction are essential to the ability of the federal government to effectively and efficiently provide key services to the public. Any policy that indiscriminately limits these meetings only results in additional inefficiencies and higher costs for the American taxpayer.

To that end, AH&LA and its members have met on numerous occasions with GSA and other agency officials to discuss ways to reduce spending at hotels and on

conferences, and to provide input to GSA during their yearly per diem rate reviews, another key component of an efficient federal travel policy. Additionally, the lodging industry has been supportive of efforts to seek an appropriate balance between responsible use of public funds and preserving the benefits of in-person meetings and conferences relied on which many agencies rely.

AH&LA has been supportive of the work of GSA's Government-wide Travel Advisory Committee (GTAC), made up of industry experts charged with examining government travel spending and identifying best practices that will lead to greater efficiencies, a critical piece of the equation. Recognizing that lodging is a cost driver for government travel – from hotel rooms to meeting rooms and everything in between – AH&LA has also developed a “federal lodging working group” to serve as a resource to government officials on methods of reducing overall travel costs. Comprised of our members and partners in the business community who have insight into the importance of business travel and the lodging and travel practices of federal employees and agencies, the working group is well-positioned to provide assistance to GTAC and GSA as those entities develop additional government travel policies. In short, the industry is working with government travel planners to help preserve mission-critical agency travel in a challenging fiscal environment.

Policies or legislation that set arbitrary spending limits on government conferences or reduce the number of employees allowed to travel without any consideration given to the importance of such meetings fail to recognize the true value of these events. Further, the full impact of these policies, as well as the blacklisting of certain travel markets, sequester cuts, lack of action on appropriations bills, and the October 2013 government shutdown can be seen across our membership.

Our member companies report that agencies are frequently cancelling because of the “optics” of holding meetings and the current political environment around government travel, in addition to uncertainty over appropriations. In 2012, one of our member companies reported losses in excess of \$4.5 million resulting from federal group cancellations due to the mandated reductions in travel spending. Further concern and uncertainty is arising as a result of federal agencies doing less long-range planning and booking, resulting in last-minute bookings and, unfortunately, higher costs.

For the Washington, D.C. region alone, the impact has been devastating. The National Conference Center, a 917-room AH&LA member property located in Leesburg, Virginia, that caters specifically to government agencies, has seen a significant drop-off in its bookings. The Center, specifically designed to address the specialized needs of government staff trainings, relies heavily on government business, which accounts for more than 90 percent of the Center's bookings. Between 2009-2012, the Center averaged annual bookings of 60,000 room nights. For 2013, the Center experienced a substantial drop in bookings, down to just 28,000 room nights, resulting in more than \$9 million in lost business, the elimination of 150 jobs, and lost state and local tax revenue.

Our members also report other reactionary steps being taken by federal agencies, including abrupt cancellations by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency of a \$197,000 contract; cancellation of a “no-frills,” no food, and no beverage \$700,000 contract with the Internal Revenue Service Office of the Taxpayer Advocate in New Orleans for a technical training; and a massive cancellation by the Department of Defense of an annual joint Army/Navy science conference in Florida. This last example represented a \$2.1 million loss in revenue for the company. Taken together, this loss in government business translated to lost hours for staff and slowed job growth and hiring at impacted hotels.

The federal government’s arbitrary cuts and limits on federal travel have far-reaching implications for our industry’s efforts to increase jobs and spur economic growth and on the ability of the federal government to do its work effectively. As such, AH&LA strongly opposes proposals that would extend the over-reactions of 2012 with additional arbitrary limits on travel, such as those contained in legislation offered by Sen. Tom Coburn (S. 1347) and Rep. Darrell Issa (H.R. 2061).

A more thoughtful, collaborative approach to reducing spending could produce the desired savings and oversight while protecting against additional job losses. We urge the Committee to carefully consider appropriate and reasoned proposals that reduce wasteful and abusive spending in government travel without negatively impacting the hotel industry. Proper oversight and better management would permit legitimate federal travel to continue, a win for federal workforce productivity, the public and hotels that serve valued government customers.

I understand that there is concern about HUD representatives attending meetings such as AHMA. While I realize that expenses must be closely scrutinized to ensure that the funds are not misallocated, as a vice president of AHMA IA/NE, I encourage you to allow HUD staff to attend AHMA and similar conferences. The input that HUD staff has been able to provide at these meetings has been invaluable for industry staff. They have helped to clarify HUD regulations, education about handbook changes, and answer questions. In addition, it offers validation to industry staff that HUD and landlords offering subsidy are working together to offer affordable housing to the community. Industry staff are able to meet with HUD staff one on one as well as the group setting at these conferences.

At the hearing for the Conference Accountability Act of 2013 (S. 1347), please reconsider. Having HUD staff present at AHMA and similar meetings is a necessity for providing quality affordable housing to our communities.

Sincerely,

Lisa Ramold

Lisa Ramold, CSW  
Program Director, Durham Booth Manor  
923 N 38 St.  
Omaha, NE. 68131  
phone: 402-898-5880  
TDY: 402-898-6076  
fax: 402-898-5946  
[Lisa\\_Ramold@USC.salvationarmy.org](mailto:Lisa_Ramold@USC.salvationarmy.org)



**Written Statement of**

**Dr. Sandra Magnus  
Executive Director**

**American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics  
Reston, Virginia**

**Hearing of the  
United States Senate Committee Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs**

**“Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal  
Government”**

**January 14, 2014**

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn and distinguished senators, I want to thank you for the opportunity to address a subject of great importance to the nation’s professional science and technology community, as well as of pointed significance to our nation’s economic and national security.

I respectfully request your consideration of changes to the guidance for and implementation requirements of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12 Section 2 regarding federal employee participation in conferences. The science and technology

community supports careful oversight of federal employee meeting and travel expenditures, and the need for fiscal responsibility and transparency in the use of public funds. However, I believe that the way OMB Memorandum M-12-12 is being currently interpreted and implemented is having the unintentional consequence of restricting the open exchange of ideas among scientists, engineers, and technologists, thereby adversely affecting important national interests by throttling back on our nation's "innovation engine."

Permitting federal employees to participate in professional meetings allows them to interact appropriately with their colleagues from other agencies, our military science directorates, universities, and industry to help facilitate the intellectual exchanges that are central to their jobs, the technology transition process, and national interests. Each sector – industry, government, and academia – approaches problems and challenges from a different perspective. It is the creative synthesis of these various perspectives, methodologies, and motivations that drives American innovation. The absence of one sector in the collaborative process hinders the progress of science and technology on which the U.S. economy and our national security depend.

The purpose of scientific and engineering conferences is to foster and encourage these vital collaborative interactions. They serve as the focal point of scientific and engineering communication across segments and disciplines. The presentation of research, the casual conversations that occur while attending meetings, and the ability to expand one's horizons and examine problems in a new light result in the forging of unanticipated and important connections, not only in technical arenas, but also in policy and program areas. It is precisely this kind of unanticipated stimulation and collaboration that led to the commercial use of GPS satellites for telecommunications, automotive and maritime location assistance, and myriad other commercial applications of a technology originally developed for military purposes.

In addition, conferences allow young professionals to meet, interact with, and be mentored by senior researchers in their field. This gives them access to the wealth of knowledge and experience of veteran researchers, allows them to capitalize on "lessons learned" from the trial and error of previous programs, and provides continuity in the transfer of crucial institutional knowledge. Young engineers are able to build a support network that provides insight and counsel as they look to overcome challenges in their own work. Students, both undergraduate and graduate, also benefit from attending conferences with professionals from academia, government, and industry. They are introduced to new ideas and diverse methods they may not otherwise experience, giving them a broader perspective from which to pursue not only their studies but also their careers. Professional pipeline development

like this also saves taxpayer money because professionals new to the industry do not have to relearn old lessons and reinvent successful processes.

As you know, Congress recently weighed in on M-12-12. In the recent consolidated appropriations bill funding the federal government for FY2014 ([HR 3547, Section 742 \(e\)](#)), Congress instructed the Executive Branch that “none of the funds... be used for travel and conference activities that are not in compliance with” M-12-12, providing a blanket endorsement of the restrictions created in the memorandum. Other legislative proposals related to M-12-12 include HR 313, which passed the House in August 2013; S.1347, which has been introduced in the Senate; and HR 2643, which was introduced in the House in July 2013.

The Congress obviously recognizes its responsibility to engage in the policy created by this OMB directive. However, despite being advised repeatedly by the scientific community, Congress has made no effort to clarify or ease those restrictions that impede federal researchers from participating in scientific and technical exchanges that enable these researchers to advance mission goals efficiently and effectively. Further this approach shows disregard for other Executive Branch directives that support federal researchers’ participation in these exchanges.

From November 2012 through October 2013, our staff recorded 23 annual conferences and meetings hosted by various scientifically and technically focused organizations, including AIAA, that were either cancelled or significantly scaled back due directly to the travel and conference attendance restrictions placed on federal employees and their employing agencies by M-12-12. As this number was derived solely based on information volunteered by these organizations, it could well be vastly underestimating the technical symposia that have been impacted.

Since 2011, AIAA has experienced a significant drop in attendance to technical meetings that provide for this open exchange, and that allow federal employees the opportunity to share best practices and state-of-the-art research with their government and non-government peers. In that year, our total conference attendance was 8644, which included some 2446 federal employees on approved job-related participation. In 2012, those numbers fell to 7890 and 2281, respectively, and in 2013, the first complete year this directive affected, they fell further to 4897 including 1360 federal employees – a total decline of 44% federal employee attendance in the course of two years. One can conclude that this decline has also directly and significantly impacted the number of non-government researchers who attend and participate in these technical conferences, further reducing the effectiveness of

these exchanges, and stymying the rate of advancement of collaboratively-achieved research.

I ask that you act to prevent Memorandum M-12-12 from being applied in a way that hampers the legitimate and necessary interactions among scientific and technical researchers who work across government, industry, and academia – interactions that drive the advancement of technology that is vital to our economy and national security. Specifically, I ask that you affirm Congress’s support of these open exchanges of information and establish legislative guidance that clarify exemptions and provide support for federal employee travel to conferences, seminars, and meetings where attendance promotes agency interests as well as the professional development and competency of government scientists, engineers, or other specialized experts. (This would be similar in spirit to the exemption from restrictions on federal employee participation in "widely attended gatherings" that is found in 5 CFR 2635.204(g)(2), and to the provision allowing government employees to serve in the governance of nonprofit organizations that is found in 5 CFR 2640.203(m)). Further, I request that Congress clarify that Memorandum M-12-12’s definition of meetings does not cover meetings involving Federal Advisory Committees, the National Academies, standards-setting bodies, industry–government workshops and conferences, or official international engagements.

As written and as currently implemented, the directives in M-12-12 stand in stark contrast with the December 17, 2010 memorandum on “Scientific Integrity” by the director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), Dr. John P. Holdren. Under Part IV, “Professional Development of Government Scientists and Engineers,” the OSTP memorandum calls for agencies to “[e]ncourage presentation of research findings at professional meetings” and “[a]llow full participation in professional or scholarly societies, committees, task forces, and other specialized bodies of professional societies....” This reflects the important role these meetings and organizations play in the professional development of the individual scientist or engineer, in the advancement of a given discipline, and of technology in general. Further, Dr. Holdren’s memorandum endorses the notion that scientific integrity and progress are aided when data and research are subjected to appropriate “independent peer review by qualified experts” – which is the very foundation of professional societies and of presentations at professional technical conferences and symposia.

Because both Congress and the Administration have demonstrated an emphasis on scientific research and engineering advancement as critical functions of the federal government, I encourage you to consider how Administration policies and directives (as well as legislative

proposals such as those contained in HR 3547) can ensure appropriate oversight without inadvertently jeopardizing our technological advantages and the vitality of the American “innovation engine” and of the technical workforce that drives it forward.

I thank you for this opportunity to address the Congress on this policy. I welcome any questions you may have on the impacts the interpretation and implementation of these restrictions are having on the research community, and proposed guidance to minimize the unintended consequences this directive may have on the U.S. scientific and engineering enterprise.

108

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
OF  
BARRY MELANCON, PRESIDENT AND CEO  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS**

**PUBLIC HEARING  
ON  
EXAMINING CONFERENCE AND TRAVEL SPENDING ACROSS THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

**JANUARY 14, 2014**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**U.S. SENATE**

**SUBMITTED JANUARY 27, 2014**

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) would like to thank Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn and the members of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government," held on January 14, 2014.

The AICPA is the world's largest member association representing the accounting profession comprised of over 394,000 members in 128 countries and a 125-year heritage of serving the public interest. AICPA members represent many areas of practice, including business and industry, public practice, government, education and consulting. The AICPA sets ethical standards for the profession and U.S. auditing standards for audits of private companies, nonprofit organizations, federal, state and local governments. It develops and grades the Uniform CPA Examination and offers specialty credentials for CPAs who concentrate on personal financial planning; fraud and forensics; business valuation; and information technology.

We applaud the Committee's efforts to host a hearing with the purpose of gaining a fuller understanding of the issues surrounding federal government conferences and travel. We understand the intent of Congress and of this Committee to achieve greater accountability and transparency in government spending, specifically spending for government-sponsored conferences. Excessive and extravagant spending of taxpayer dollars is inexcusable. We are, however, concerned that legislative proposals to unreasonably restrict federal employee participation in meetings and conferences hosted by non-governmental organizations, such as professional associations like the AICPA and state CPA societies, is having a chilling effect on these meetings and will deter important dialogues between regulators and those they regulate. Just as members of Congress gain valuable insights through in-person interactions with colleagues and constituents, federal officials' face-to-face participation in conferences and meetings provide critical exchanges with stakeholders that cannot be replaced by webinars and conference calls.

#### AICPA Conferences and Meetings

The AICPA hosts dozens of conferences and meetings throughout the year and around the country to facilitate regulators' accessibility to those affected by federal regulations. These events range from small groups of subject matter experts meeting to discuss proposed guidance for new regulations to thousands of CPAs attending educational conferences to learn about the latest changes to accounting rules to prepare for the upcoming public company reporting season. At many of these conferences and meetings, the AICPA invites members of Congress and federal officials – both political appointees and career federal employees – to participate. These officials bring a level of expertise, unmatched by any other source, regarding the current status of laws and regulations affecting the work performed by the accounting profession, as auditors of public company financial statements, preparers of tax returns and providers of other services.

Generally, conferences with larger numbers of federal agency attendees are held in Washington, DC, although some have satellite locations or are rotated to other parts of the country to minimize travel requirements for all attendees. Importantly, these meetings are not held just one time per year in Washington, but at various points during the year around the country to facilitate regulators' accessibility to those affected by federal regulations. While the majority of those federal employees attending the DC-based conferences merely travel across town, employees stationed in New York and elsewhere also attend at the satellite locations, when available. In these cases, federal employees who

work in multiple locations are able to attend in person, traveling within a reasonable distance from their duty station (at very low cost) and interact with participants from the private sector, providing real world commentary and context to the regulations they administer and oversee. Importantly, federal employees who are CPAs are also keeping their technical accounting skills and CPA licenses current through their attendance at these events.

For example:

- Officials from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) spoke at the AICPA's Annual Conference on Current SEC and PCAOB Developments in December 2013. That conference included approximately 1,400 participants in Washington, DC, and, eliminating the need for long-distance travel, also included a large number of participants in Chicago, IL, Los Angeles, CA, New York, NY, and online. Included among conference participants were federal officials from multiple agencies. Topics addressed by SEC and PCAOB officials included "Developments in the Division of Corporate Finance," "Office of the Chief Accountant Policy Initiatives," the "Role of Data Analysis in the Future of Financial Reporting," and a "PCAOB Standard Setting Update."
- The annual Government Accounting and Auditing Update Conference in Washington, DC, with nearly 500 participants, includes an entire federal track that draws a significant number of federal employees. These federal employees, who are involved with key spending and audit functions within the federal government, gain up-to-date information on important accounting and auditing developments, ensuring that accounting for federal spending and audit quality remain high.
- The Joint Committee on Employee Benefits Government Invitational, jointly sponsored by the AICPA and American Bar Association, is held annually in Baltimore, Maryland. Officials from several federal agencies and Congress joined dozens of accounting profession leaders at the March 2013 conference titled "Benefits in an Era of Middle Class (In) Security in Employment and Beyond." Topics included "Preparing for Boomer Retirement – Phased in and Delayed Retirement" and "Executive Compensation: Employment & Severance Agreements in a Changing Environment."

In addition to these larger conferences, the AICPA also hosts a number of smaller meetings with practitioner volunteers. Generally, these are held in the AICPA's offices in Washington, DC, but also occasionally take place in other cities. Federal officials are often asked to participate to engage in direct dialogue with profession leaders and exchange information regarding current and proposed regulatory requirements. For example:

- Twice a year, the AICPA coordinates a meeting called the Single Audit Roundtable in Washington, DC. The objective of the meeting is to provide an opportunity for single audit constituents in government and the audit profession to discuss current developments and future activities concerning audits of federal awards. Typically, the meeting includes federal agency representatives from Offices of Inspectors General, federal program offices, Government Accountability Office, Office of Management and Budget, and other key agencies. This meeting is essential to open lines of communication between all parties involved and to discuss issues to improve single audits and their usefulness to the federal agencies.
- AICPA's tax technical resource panels, each specializing in specific areas of the tax code, are comprised of CPAs who are leaders in public practice, education, and business and industry that meet in person approximately two times per year. Department of Treasury and Internal

Revenue Service officials are invited to more than half of the panel meetings to exchange ideas, discuss guidance projects and technical issues, and gain important feedback and suggestions from stakeholders. The AICPA disseminates the guidance derived from those meetings to AICPA member tax preparers, ultimately benefitting taxpayers. In addition, the AICPA often prepares commentary to the government based on issues discussed at these meetings. For example, recent meetings have included discussions in such highly technical areas as the generation-skipping transfer tax, portability of the deceased spousal unused exclusion amount, and tangible property regulations.

#### Conference Attendance Trends

It is important to note that since the recent General Services Administration and IRS conference scandals occurred and the resulting spotlight on federal conferences and travel, the AICPA has seen a drop in attendance at its conferences, both of federal employees and private sector attendees. While the economy, generally, has been improving during this time, this trend calls into question whether the reduction can be attributed in part to private sector attendee concerns that there will be fewer government attendees with whom to interact.

Federal agency officials attend such conferences often for the purpose of their own continuing professional education, as many are licensed professionals, and because these conferences include dissemination of important technical information required for them to successfully perform their jobs. CPAs, like lawyers and doctors, must regularly earn continuing professional education credits, and the AICPA is concerned that reduced federal attendance could have significantly detrimental effects on federal employee CPAs in maintaining their CPA licenses.

#### Legislative Proposals

Several legislative proposals have been considered in the 112<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> Congresses that would impact federal employees' attendance at conferences and the use of taxpayer dollars to pay for conferences.

While the AICPA recognizes that the goals of such legislation are to provide transparency for travel and conference spending by federal agencies, it is concerned that legislation that does not provide the ability to highlight beneficial effects of conferences will have unintended consequences with substantial impacts on professionals at associations like the AICPA. Although Congress intends to limit unnecessary spending for federal employee travel and government-sponsored conferences and enhance federal accountability, the AICPA cautions against passage of any legislation that effectively precludes officials' attendance at non-governmental meetings and conferences which either directly or indirectly provides a significant benefit to CPAs, taxpayers, and other stakeholders.

#### Summary

The AICPA believes that the exchange of information that occurs between regulators and CPAs – whether federal officials are speakers or participants at conferences – has significant positive benefits creating transparency and understanding of the government's regulatory impact on business and the public at large.

The AICPA is concerned that any actions that unduly limit federal government officials from attending meetings and conferences, such as those held by the AICPA, will have a significant negative impact on government. Federal employees who are themselves professional CPAs, lawyers, doctors, and scientists should be encouraged to maintain their licenses and technical expertise to ensure they fulfill their duties competently and effectively.

The AICPA believes that without interaction with those individual stakeholders who are affected by governmental actions, federal officials may find themselves cut off from understanding the impact their actions have on the lives and business interests of all Americans. Rather than discouraging participation, the AICPA further hopes that Congress will use its influence to encourage federal officials to speak at non-governmental conferences as a very effective way to disseminate key information and share their expert guidance to those they regulate.

The AICPA is optimistic that the information provided by federal and public witnesses, as a result of this hearing, will lead this Committee, the Senate and the entire Congress to use their oversight authority to call for continuing the open and honest dialogue that occurs at professional conferences and meetings. It is imperative that regulators have these opportunities for discussion with stakeholders, including CPAs who work with taxpayers, businesses, federal, state and local governments officials, in order to craft strong, workable regulations that protect the public.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on this important topic. Please contact Diana Huntress Deem in our Washington office at 202.434.9276 or [ddeem@aicpa.org](mailto:ddeem@aicpa.org) if there are additional questions.



## The American Physiological Society

9650 Rockville Pike • Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3991 (USA) • Tel: 301-634-7164 • Fax: 301-634-7241  
 E-mail: [webmaster@the-aps.org](mailto:webmaster@the-aps.org) • Web: [www.the-aps.org](http://www.the-aps.org)

### PRESIDENT

Kim E. Barrett  
 University of California,  
 San Diego

### PAST PRESIDENT

Susan M. Barman  
 Michigan State University

### PRESIDENT-ELECT

David M. Pollock  
 Georgia Regents University

### COUNCILLORS

Dennis Brown  
 Massachusetts General  
 Hospital

Pamela K. Carmines  
 University of Nebraska  
 College of Medicine

John C. Chatham  
 University of Alabama  
 at Birmingham

M. Harold Laughlin  
 University of Missouri

Marilyn P. Merker  
 Medical College of  
 Wisconsin

Patricia E. Molina  
 Louisiana State University  
 Health Sciences Center

Marshall H. Montrose  
 University of Cincinnati

Jane F. Reckelhoff  
 University of Mississippi  
 Medical Center

William T. Talman  
 University of Iowa  
 Hospitals and Clinics

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Martin Frank

January 29, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Carper and Coburn,

The American Physiological Society (APS) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee on current and proposed restrictions on travel for employees of the federal government. The APS represents more than 11,000 member physiologists who conduct research and teach at institutions across the country, including in academia, industry and government agencies. Each year the APS sponsors several scientific conferences where scientists can exchange ideas, share the results of their research and forge critical connections with their colleagues. Restricting the ability of federal scientists to participate in these interactions has a negative impact on the scientists themselves, as well as on the scientific community as a whole. To learn more about these impacts, we asked our members who work for the federal government to share their concerns with us in an anonymous forum. Their input is included in our comments.

Scientific meetings provide a unique environment where researchers gather to share the results of their work with others. Learning about what other researchers are doing in the field helps spur new ideas and foster collaborations. This exchange of ideas is crucial for problem-solving and future innovation. Scientists critically review the work that is presented, including preliminary data. Their feedback in turn enhances the research. These interactions are particularly important for early career scientists. These individuals, who are just establishing a research program, often have the most to gain from their interactions with more senior members of their discipline.

Moreover, the current travel restrictions effectively set some government scientists up for failure. For example scientists at the NIH must achieve an international scientific reputation in order to be granted tenure. Because they are not allowed to make timely commitments to present their research at scholarly meetings—even when there would be no cost to the government—the organizers have to look elsewhere. If researchers with world-class potential are penalized for government service, they too will look elsewhere.

Scientific conferences also serve as a place to meet other scientists trying to solve similar problems. Senior scientists looking to hire personnel for their labs recruit at these meetings, and junior scientists attend to seek future employment. By restricting travel, federal researchers are unable to take advantage of opportunities to share the

results of their work, collaborate with their peers, improve their research programs, and recruit promising junior scientists.

Restrictions placed on travel for federal scientists also limit their participation in the activities of their scientific societies that sometimes include continuing medical education. Because clinicians who work for government agencies are required to maintain their credentials, they face particular challenges when travel restrictions prevent them from participating in continuing education activities.

Travel restrictions have also imposed significant administrative burden due to the lengthy and onerous approval process. Some members report they have to request approval so far in advance that the meeting programs are not yet published, making it difficult to judge whether the meeting would be useful to attend. Moreover, due to the long processing time, final travel approval may come just before the scientific meeting. This is problematic and costly because booking hotel rooms and purchasing airline travel at a late date is more difficult than doing so well in advance, and it is costly for the government since late meeting registration fees are higher. We were told that some agencies have implemented additional administrative requirements, further diverting taxpayer resources that might otherwise be used to fund research directly. Our impression is that the amount of administrative scrutiny being given to travel would surprise the Committee.

In addition to the negative impacts on individual government researchers and the cost to the government, restricting the ability of federal scientists to participate in the scientific community is detrimental to the progress of science. Cross-cutting collaborations and interdisciplinary interactions are increasingly being recognized as the shortest and best path to the successful translation of scientific findings into practice. Reducing the participation of government scientists in the research community dilutes federal input, influence, and impact on course of scientific thought, and it runs counter to the goal of maximizing access to the results of government funded research. There are also many government scientists who make funding decisions about grants for the extramural scientific community. By restricting their access to scientific conferences, they cannot maintain an up-to-date knowledge of their fields. These scientists also serve as an invaluable source of information for extramural scientists, who look to them for information about funding priorities and the grant review process.

The scientific community relies heavily on federal support for the conduct of basic research, both through extramural grant funding and intramural programs whose employees work directly for the federal government. Resources must be used wisely and in an accountable, transparent manner. The current restrictions on travel for federal scientists have limited their ability to effectively and efficiently carry out their missions. Efforts should be made to revise the regulations to ensure that scientists can be active participants in the scientific community without wasting taxpayer dollars on administrative burden.

Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,



Kim E. Barrett, Ph.D.  
President

The American Horticulture Industry Association, known as AmericanHort, appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony for the record for the January 14, 2014 Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing titled “Examining Conference and Travel Spending across the Federal Government.”

AmericanHort was formed in 2014, with the consolidation of the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) and OFA—The Association of Horticultural Professionals. Together we have a combined 220 years of experience in supporting the horticulture industry. AmericanHort is comprised of nearly 16,000 active members and affiliates that grow nursery and greenhouse plants, sell lawn and garden products, design, install, and care for landscapes, and sell supplies to the industry. Typical members include growers, garden center retailers, horticultural distributors, landscape professionals, and suppliers to the industry. A number of firms are engaged in more than one of these operations.

It is important for Federal Government employees and officials to attend the events and meetings of AmericanHort and our partner, the Horticultural Research Institute. Our industry is multifaceted and nationwide, and routinely engages and interacts with numerous federal government departments agencies. And due to the complexity of our issues, including the production of agricultural products, onsite involvement by government representatives is necessary for them to fully understand the uniqueness of horticulture and our industry. This includes the breeding, production, distribution, and marketing of our products and services.

Horticulture is a science-based industry. Therefore, we rely on the partnership with various government agencies and departments to further research and its application with respect to production, harvest, post-harvest handling, installation, human and environmental resource management. This cannot be done from desks in Washington, DC or satellite research/extension offices. They need to see the industry at work. Collaboration and knowledge sharing happens at events where there is farther reach into the industry. This leads to healthier plant stock and improved business management, and furthers the billions of dollars in economic activity that horticulture provides to the U.S. economy.

Furthermore, much of our work is affected by or dictated by policy established by elected and appointed officials, and regulators. They cannot possibly grasp the full extent of our issues and business experiences by email, teleconference or webinars. We suggest they need to see, touch and feel our products, and hear first-hand from industry experts and laypersons in order to develop better policies. For example, last year a senior White House policy advisor attended our annual trade show and convention. This person’s portfolio included horticulture-related programs. Having seen the breadth and diversity of our industry, the advisor remarked that it was far different from what was understood and discussed during policy discussions. It was only from attending an event that this person fully grasped what it is we do as an association and offer as an industry. While Congressional action may not limit White House staff this serves as a good example of how attending industry events is important to everyone, especially our policy makers and managers.

Similarly, almost two years ago, we co-hosted a delegation from the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for the design and operation of the E-Verify program. The

opportunity to see operations first-hand and engage in direct and open conversations with agricultural employers helped shape their thinking with respect to more flexible and effective platforms, potentially including mobile device interfaces, to facilitate employment eligibility verification compliance.

Certainly, not every interaction requires travel and face to face meetings. Business, government, and non-profits are using many types of technology to facilitate cost-effective communication. Still, there is often no good substitute for face to face interaction. Maintaining opportunities for in-person engagement from and with our government will help American horticulture continue to be a leading economic engine for the U.S. and the premier global horticulture industry.

AmericanHort thanks you for your consideration of our views.

---

Michael V. Geary, CAE | President & CEO  
AmericanHort: The Consolidation of ANLA and OFA  
Columbus, OH | Washington, DC  
New email address: [MichaelG@AmericanHort.org](mailto:MichaelG@AmericanHort.org)  
202-789-8110 Direct | 614-487-1117 Main | 202-270-2760 Mobile | 202-789-8114 Direct Fax



ASSOCIATION FOR MOLECULAR PATHOLOGY  
 Education. Innovation & Improved Patient Care. Advocacy.  
 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland 20814  
 Tel: 301-634-7939 | Fax: 301-634-7995 | [amp@amp.org](mailto:amp@amp.org) | [www.amp.org](http://www.amp.org)

**Written Testimony Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
 Hearing on:  
 "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"**

**From the Association for Molecular Pathology  
 January 14, 2014**

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee's hearing on the issue of federal employee travel. The Association for Molecular Pathology (AMP) is an international professional society representing approximately 2,300 physicians, doctoral scientists, and medical technologists who perform laboratory testing based on knowledge derived from molecular biology, genetics and genomics. Membership includes professionals from the government, academic and commercial clinical laboratories, community hospitals, and the *in vitro* diagnostics industry. AMP is proud that there are many members who work for the government who often participate in AMP sponsored meetings, government sponsored meetings, and meetings planned jointly with federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The contribution of federally employed physicians, scientists, and laboratories is instrumental to the advancement of the field of molecular pathology.

AMP is very concerned that changes in federal employee travel policies could impede participation of government-employed physicians, scientists, and other professionals in AMP scientific meetings, sacrificing important opportunities for these individuals to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the rapidly changing field of molecular pathology. Moreover, these new travel policies will potentially interfere with working relationships between our organization and its members and federal agencies, and restrict interactions and dialogue with agency officials implementing and overseeing programs with direct implications for patients and the field of molecular pathology. AMP has already been informed by several agency officials that new travel policies prevented them from addressing and otherwise participating in our 2012 and 2013 annual meetings.

The House of Representatives recently passed H.R. 313, The Government Spending Accountability Act, which was referred to your Committee along with S. 1347 The Conference Accountability Act introduced by Ranking Member Coburn. AMP has significant concerns with both pieces of legislation in so far as they have the potential to restrict scientists and clinicians from attending scientific and medical professional meetings for the purposes of obtaining continuing medical education (CME) and interacting in scientific and medical contexts with professional peers. This result is likely to prove detrimental to relevant federal agency effectiveness and operations for several reasons.

First, among the important benefits of attendance at scientific medical meetings are the informal contacts and networking that lead to important scientific exchanges. At times, this flow of information and spontaneous collaboration can be more important than information obtained through scientific journals. For federally employed physicians and scientists who engage in research, inability to participate in medical and scientific meetings will slow the pace of advancements and harm innovation, risking the leading position the United States has in this critical area. In a [study published January 2, 2014 in the \*New England Journal of Medicine\*](#),

researchers found the United States (public and industry) comprised 51% of global research spending, at \$131 billion in 2007. But by 2012, that number dropped to \$119 billion, or 45% of the world's biomedical research spending. By comparison, Japan and China increased their spending by \$9 billion and \$6.4 billion, respectively, during the same time. In Asia-Oceania countries (Australia, China, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan), the proportion spent increased from 18.1% to 23.8%.

In addition, scientific and medical meetings provide opportunities for "cross pollination" between industry, basic science researchers, and clinical scientists. At meetings, the scientists in the commercial sector often learn of important discoveries in federal research labs, creating opportunities for academia, industry and the government to collaborate. These face-to-face interactions help spur the translation of government-performed basic research into clinical applications.

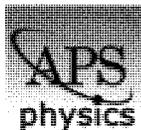
Further, government scientists working in regulatory and research agencies are advising on and making critical decisions that impact funding, approval of treatments, coverage and payment determinations, etc. Attending scientific and medical meetings keeps these federally employed scientists informed of the latest advances in scientific understanding and clinical research. Considering the impact that their decisions have on defining the focus of grants, patients' access to new treatments, promoting public health, and more, it is imperative that they are able to attend these meetings to continue their education.

Finally, a cap on spending or the number of attendees able to attend a particular meeting would severely curtail the training, certification and licensure of government physicians and health professionals throughout the government, including those serving the military and veteran populations. For instance, the Veteran's Administration has more than 200,000 employees, including approximately 20,000 physicians across more than 150 medical centers. Those physicians need to earn CME credits to not only to maintain certifications and licensure, but also to ensure that veterans are receiving the most up to date clinical care. Medical meetings often provide unique opportunities for hands on training and demonstrations. Moreover, for some rapidly progressing fields such as molecular pathology, onsite CME is sparse or not available at all, making attendance at such conferences their only live option for maintenance and advancement of specialized professional skills.

Scientific and medical meetings that provide CME must complete a rigorous accreditation process through the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). As an initial criterion for CME accreditation, sponsors must demonstrate intent to provide CME on a regular basis, information free from commercial bias, and valid and worthwhile content. Next, the organizations must complete a five step pre-application process, which includes self-study reports, interviews, performance-in-practice reviews, and more. Obtaining accreditation to provide CME is a daunting, expensive and time consuming process. This ensures a true commitment from organizations to provide valuable CME and the scrutiny promotes high quality educational opportunities for scientists and clinicians.

Federal employees, receive great value in attending meetings such as the Association for Molecular Pathology Annual Meetings for the reasons outlined in previous paragraphs. As the Committee considers legislation restricting federal employee travel, **AMP respectfully requests that nonprofit scientific and medical associations' meetings for which education is the primary goal, be exempted from a cap or restriction on federal employee travel.**

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit written testimony and your consideration of AMP's concerns. If you have any questions or AMP may be of assistance, please contact Mary Steele Williams, MNA, MT(ASCP)SM, AMP Executive Director at [mwilliams@amp.org](mailto:mwilliams@amp.org) or (301) 634-7921.



American  
Physical  
Society

One Physics Ellipse  
College Park, MD 20740-3844  
Tel: (301) 209-3269  
Fax: (301) 209-0967  
www.aps.org

**President**  
Malcolm R. Beasley  
*Stanford University*

**President-Elect**  
Samuel H. Aronson  
*Brookhaven National  
Laboratory*

**Vice President**  
Homer A. Neal  
*University of Michigan*

**Past President**  
Michael S. Turner  
*University of Chicago*

**Executive Officer**  
Kate P. Kirby  
*Harvard-Smithsonian  
(Retired)*

**Treasurer**  
Joseph W. Serene  
*Georgetown University  
(Emeritus)*

**Editor in Chief**  
Gene D. Sprouse  
*Stony Brook University  
(On Leave)*

January 13, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper:

On behalf of the American Physical Society (APS) and its more than 50,000 members, I thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with your committee as you discuss existing and proposed policies impacting conference and travel spending across the federal government. While APS supports efforts by Congress and the Administration to increase accountability and transparency of federal expenditures and to curb wasteful spending, we have concerns with the impact that current policies, as well as the proposed Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2013 (DATA), are having on the nation's scientific enterprise.

Each year, APS formally hosts approximately 10 conferences and its membership participates in hundreds of others. The participation of government, university and industry employees at professional conferences creates a unique environment that fosters rapid information exchange and spawns innovative research ideas. Attending conferences allows federal researchers to increase their exposure to other institutions, to stay current on promising research areas, to engage with a wide array of researchers in a single location, and to initiate new collaborations. The conference experience is beneficial for all, as attendees have access to nearly all of the experts in the field, which is unique to attending a professional conference.

However, the dynamic and diverse conference environment is changing. Current policies and the proposed DATA Act increase the difficulty of organizing a successful conference and alter conference attendance. Capping an agency's expenditure for a single conference and increased reporting requirements are having the following deleterious impacts:

- **The number of federal employees from U.S. National Laboratories in attendance is severely limited.** An agency expenditure cap restricts federal scientists' and engineers' access to the most recent scientific developments and state-of-the-art research, thus placing the nation's science community at a global disadvantage and compromising our national security.

- **The National Laboratories' ability to attract the best and brightest future employees is being reduced.** Conferences are well attended by undergraduate and graduate students presenting their research and serve as fertile recruiting sites. Reducing the number of federal employees attending limits opportunities to recruit the next generation of scientists and engineers.
- **It is becoming increasingly difficult to organize a successful conference.** The reporting requirements are an administrative burden and create large uncertainties for conference planners. Tasks ranging from scheduling plenary lecturers to guaranteeing the number of rooms necessary to gain access to a hotel's conference facilities are often in limbo as federal employees await travel approval from their respective agency.

APS recognizes that current fiscal constraints are forcing agencies to adopt more stringent travel policies. However, the current policies have resulted in unintended consequences and have negatively impacted the scientific community. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to develop policies that allow federal agencies and their employees to fully participate in professional conferences while ensuring government transparency and accountability.

Sincerely,



Malcolm R. Beasley  
President of the American Physical Society



January 14, 2014

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Re: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

The American Society of Association Executives ("ASAE") is a section 501(c)(6) individual membership organization representing more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners from nearly 10,000 tax-exempt organizations. Our members manage leading trade associations, individual membership societies, and voluntary organizations in every state as well as in 50 countries around the globe. All of our members host meetings, educational, scientific and medical events designed to provide and share information and to offer training with the most up-to-date information and best practices of an industry or profession.

As you examine the issue of internal federal conferences and the progress made on oversight, we ask that you note the differences between government conferences and association conferences. For federal employees, the opportunity to meet professionals in the private sector at association meetings and conferences, especially with the sectors of the economy they regulate and influence, is critical to the policymaking process.

*In every sector, a federal agency needs to hear and learn from the experts in their field and very often those experts come together under the umbrella of a trade or professional society. From technology to protect our armed forces, to new cures for deadly diseases to better building techniques for federal facilities, the knowledge and technology that can save the government money while creating better public policy is offered at association meetings and educational programs that occur every week.*

The ability to bring together so many knowledgeable experts takes place at meetings and conferences held by associations and is a significant resource to government employees. Oftentimes, significant working relationships are formed by post-speech discussions following up on the topics presented. *Further, at these meetings association members learn best practices in order to work most productively with government, are apprised of the latest developments in state and federal policy and regulations, and learn of challenges on the horizon to their industries. This interaction is mutually beneficial for both the private and the public sector.*

Because of the need to reduce the federal deficit, it is important to eliminate unnecessary spending. However, blanket restrictions that prohibit travel either in response to isolated incidences are shortsighted. *The dual goals of public-private partnership and good government can be achieved simultaneously without severing attendance at private meetings.*

For the past few years ASAE has worked with Congress and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ensure that any response to the inappropriately lavish conferences that are the topic of today's

hearing would not unduly harm the ability of federal employees to attend legitimate and necessary training sessions and conferences held by the private sector.

At a House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee hearing in February 2013, then-OMB Comptroller Daniel Werfel testified that the new travel policies are delivering results. Travel spending dropped by \$2 billion from 2010 to 2012, according to Mr. Werfel, and agencies have also adopted more cost-effective practices when it comes to planning conferences, including use of government-owned meeting space whenever possible. The OMB oversight on travel has had a meaningful impact on government travel.

We have been very concerned with proposals that have been considered by Congress, and that have actually been included in legislation approved by both the Senate and the House (though not enacted into law), that are overly broad and that, if ever enacted, could have a dramatic chilling effect on the necessary interchange of information between the federal government and associations. Some of these actually classify a private meeting as a federal or public meeting if federal employees participate in panels and presentations. While we understand the need for transparency, some of the disclosure provisions that have been proposed would subject private and proprietary information to full disclosure on federal websites. This would discourage the flow of information and expertise, and would result in many participants declining to participate in important informational panels. This is especially a problem for scientific and medical meetings where unpublished works are often shared for peer review and comment.

We urge caution on legislative proposals, that while well-intentioned, would have unintended consequences of limiting the kinds of meetings and information exchange that is in the best interest of everyone. We also caution Congress and the Obama Administration to not, intentionally or inadvertently, wholly restrict federal employees from attending association conferences and educational events.

I encourage you during this important hearing to consider the value of education and training meetings for the federal workforce and how the association community is driving this sector of the economy. I am happy to work with you on the issue and am ready to provide numerous examples of how associations are driving society and the economy through their meetings and training programs. If I can answer any question, please contact me or Jim Clarke, senior vice president of public policy, at 202.626.2865 or [jclarke@asaecenter.org](mailto:jclarke@asaecenter.org).

Sincerely,



John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE  
President & CEO

Please accept my comments as a former member and participant in meetings of the American Association of Association Executives from 1976 to 2008. During this time I was the CEO of a Canadian professional accounting body, and participated as a member of ASAE in regular meetings of the Association which were attended by a broad spectrum of delegates, including those from many North American as well as offshore government jurisdictions.

Prior to entering association management I worked in the private sector for an accounting firm, followed by 8 years as a senior professional in government finance, both of which served as valuable experience and provided insight to the relationships necessary for a healthy business environment. Bridging the gap between the public and private sectors to develop synergy has always been a challenge, and one of the most effective means is through open and frequent communication, both written and face to face. To curtail such opportunity is counterproductive, to say the least!

By my own experience, the progress and goodwill that developed through hundreds of meetings and conferences between our professional members and government staff within our own jurisdiction is not something that can be discounted by dollar cost or time spent because these activities are indeed an investment. As a Canadian I have no connection to American politics other than as a friend and observer; however I must state that I strongly support ASAE's position regarding the need for reasoned meeting travel.

I am certain that my colleagues in the United States will provide ample logistical information to support their argument in addition to the values that I have touched on above and I wish you success in your deliberations on this important issue.

Leonard W Hampson FCGA  
42 Cameo Crescent,  
Winnipeg, Mb. Canada R2K2W4  
204-654-1809 Cell 204-771-5771  
[lhampson@mts.net](mailto:lhampson@mts.net)



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR LABORATORY ANIMAL SCIENCE

AALAS is an association of professionals that advances responsible laboratory animal care and use to benefit people and animals.

9190 Crestwyn Hills Dr.  
Memphis, TN 38125-8538  
(901) 754-8620  
fax: (901) 753-0046  
e-mail: info@aalas.org

January 9, 2014

Dear Committee Members,

As you prepare for the upcoming hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending across the Federal Government," I would like to impress upon you the value of encouraging the presence of government employees at professional association meetings. Public-private partnerships are greatly enhanced through the power of face-to-face meetings and foster a synergy that is required to advance our country's future growth, health, and wellbeing.

The limitations on travel for federal employees hinder government employees' participation in non-governmental meetings and conferences. In my profession, there is useful dialogue that takes place at meetings between government employees and the academic and private sector. This dialogue is essential to the development of informed policymaking to facilitate innovation, economic growth, job creation, and scientific advancements.

Federal employees from organizations including the CDC, NIH, USDA, and FDA often attend our professional meetings and present information on new and developing topics in biosecurity, animal welfare, and research initiatives, contributing to the education of all participants. Limiting federal employee attendance at our professional meetings would severely compromise the dissemination of information and could impact future research progress, medical discoveries, and the overall public health and welfare initiatives important for the future.

In addition, the research community works hard to meet the letter and spirit of all governmental regulations. The bars for remaining compliant appear to be getting higher and the external environment for performing animal-based research is more complex and multifaceted than ever before. The professionals in our research communities need face-to-face meetings with federal employees and regulators so they can understand the pressures under which we operate and so we can understand the mandates we are tasked to fulfill. These relationships are important so we can work in partnership to develop effective regulatory policies that allow researchers in the United States to remain competitive and compliant.

The members of our association are the professionals who comprise the backbone of research in the United States. These are the employees working in the fields of science who are striving to advance technologies to benefit our nation's citizens and they need to be able to join with their government employee counterparts in order to advance responsible laboratory animal care and use to benefit the people and animals in the United States.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott A. Mischler, DVM, PHD, DAACLAM  
American Association for Laboratory Animal Science, President  
9190 Crestwyn Hills Dr.  
Memphis, TN. 38125

Dear Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for us to voice our concerns to your committee regarding travel expense for government employees to conferences. We are a small state association for foot and ankle physicians and surgeons (podiatrists). We have 620 physician members and 400 student members at the Kent State College of Podiatric Medicine in OHIO. **Congressman Brad Wenstrup** (R- OH Dist. 2) is one of our members, an army reservist and a wonderful podiatric surgeon.

Our physician members serve veterans as Veterans Administration (VA) employees in the membership classification category of "Federal Services". We have Residency programs in VA Hospitals and are training tomorrow's physicians for jobs in the VA Hospital system. The VA Hospitals must recruit and retain quality physicians and should be able to offer available continuing medical education to employees which the VA cannot offer physicians of every medical specialty—one example is podiatry. We provide quality continuing medical education cost-effectively; that is our Mission as an association. We request that you allow VA physicians the right to continue to travel to medical education conferences so that our veterans can receive the best medical standard of care by podiatric physicians in Ohio and throughout the United States.

We can attest that our members save limbs and lives via medical educational programs presented by our association. Foot amputations due to diabetes complications and gangrene happen daily in VA Hospitals. Where would our surgeons be if they didn't hear and see the latest medical treatment protocols to save toes, feet, ankles or learn how to better biopsy melanomas in the VA clinics and hospitals in Ohio? I'm sure that Senator Portman and Senator Brown would concur with us and rightfully want our physicians in Ohio's Veterans Administration Hospitals to be the best they can be with current professional development to save our veteran's limbs and lives.

We respectfully ask the committee to recommend that Government employees continue to have the right to travel to conferences for training and professional development to keep America walking and working for a stronger America.

JIMELLE RUMBERG, PH.D., CAE  
*Executive Director*  
OH Foot and Ankle Medical Association  
[www.opma.org](http://www.opma.org)  
614.457.6269



---

Industrial Minerals Association — North America

January 10, 2014

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Hearing Titled, "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

The Industrial Minerals Association – North America (IMA-NA) is a trade association that represents companies that produce industrial minerals such as ball clay, barite, bentonite, borates, calcium carbonate, diatomite, feldspar, industrial sand, kaolin, mica, soda ash, talc, wollastonite, and other industrial minerals, and associate member companies that provide goods and services to the industry. IMA-NA typically represents seventy-five percent or more of the production for each of these minerals in the United States.

The United States enjoys the most environmentally benign processes for production of industrial minerals in the world. Industrial minerals are critical to the manufacturing processes of many of the products that we use every day. They are used in the production of glass, ceramics, paper, plastics, rubber, detergents, insulation, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. They also are used in foundry cores and molds used for metal castings, paints, filtration, metallurgical applications, refractory products and specialty fillers. IMA-NA members have demonstrated a commitment to the goals of sustainable development and operating in an environmentally friendly manner.

On behalf of IMA-NA, I would like to echo the testimony provided by the American Society of Association Executives on this matter. It is critical that you appreciate and note the differences between government conferences and association conferences as you move forward. Attendance of government employees at our meetings and education programs is an essential tool to the policymaking process. Associations, such as ours, typically have a broad and strong presence at these meetings from our members who are spread throughout the country, which only adds to the value of having government employees present at these meetings as well. The overall interaction that we've witnessed tends to be mutually beneficial for our members and the government employees as it allows all parties to have a better understanding of each others' positions.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
January 10, 2014  
Page 2

While we applaud efforts by Congress and the Administration to manage spending and to encourage more transparency among government agencies as it relates to travel, we have been concerned with various legislative proposals circulating in Congress in recent years that could serve to significantly diminish the interactions between federal government employees and trade associations. We urge Congress to be mindful of concerns that the legislative proposals could have the unintended consequences of closing the door on the valuable federal employee interactions that occur at association meetings.

We thank you for the interest you have shown in this important issue with this hearing, and we encourage you to ensure that the communication lines between federal employees and trade associations remain open as we move forward. IMA-NA stands ready to work with the Committee on this important issue as you move forward. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Mark G. Ellis  
President

16 January 2014

### **The Impact of Travel Restrictions on Scientific Communication**

#### **Some Perspectives from the American Society of Human Genetics**

The fall 2013 confluence of sequestration, a government shutdown, and OMB restrictions on travel to scientific meetings created a perfect storm of uncertainty that had a significant, negative effect on the annual meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG), the largest genetics professional society in the world. Our annual meeting, which attracts about 7,000 members worldwide, is a major forum for the exchange of new ideas in human genetics, one of the most rapidly changing disciplines in all of science, and one that has important implications for personal and public health.

Government scientists are instrumental in the generation of new knowledge in this field, and they have a responsibility, as do all scientists, to share their results with their colleagues as part of the process that validates new findings. That responsibility is especially important for those supported by public funds.

More than 125 government scientists registered for our 2013 meeting, held in Boston from 22-26 October. Virtually all of them were to be active participants, presenting their government-supported research in various forums (platform presentations, workshops, posters) that serve as rigorous, de facto oversight on the quality of their work and on the value of the federal expenditures required to support it.

We operated under the assumption that the shutdown would continue through October, and therefore through our entire meeting, and we cancelled an important workshop on bioinformatics that was to be conducted by NCBI staff. That cancellation alone deprived 200 workshop registrants of the expertise and insights of government-funded scientists. The need to arrange alternative programming for the original registrants substantially disrupted our planning.

The shutdown ended only a few days before our meeting began, and, thanks to strong contingency plans, ASHG and NHGRI were able to arrange for many, but not all, registered NIH scientists to travel to Boston. Even with the lifting of the shutdown, many government scientists were excluded from our meeting because of the impact of sequestration and OMB restrictions. Sadly, many of those affected were trainees – doctoral students or postdoctoral fellows who constitute the next generation of investigators. It is especially harmful to these young people and to the future of the discipline to restrict their attendance at meetings such as ours, which provides many opportunities for interaction with senior scientists from all over the world.

This last point highlights an intangible, but critical, aspect of the nature of science: it is inherently and necessarily a social endeavor. From the informal interactions that occur at meetings to the formal collaborations that often result, and to the public scrutiny of new research, the process of science requires that scientists interact with one another in person. Restrictions on travel impede those interactions and jeopardize the scientific enterprise.

Joseph D. McInerney  
Executive Vice President



Shaping Tomorrow's  
Built Environment Today

1791 Tullie Circle NE • Atlanta, Ga. 30329-2305 • Tel- 678.636.8400 • Fax 678.321.5478 • www.ashrae.org

William P. Bahnfleth, Ph.D., P. E., FASHRAE, FASME  
President

Reply to: [wbahnfleth@psu.edu](mailto:wbahnfleth@psu.edu)

January 20, 2014

Senator Thomas R. Carper  
Chairman  
Senate Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs Committee

Senator Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member  
Senate Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs Committee

**RE: Hearing Entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"**

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

On behalf of ASHRAE's over 54,000 members, I strongly urge you to protect the critical exchange of ideas and generation of new solutions to pressing national concerns that occurs at face-to-face private sector technical conferences by avoiding overly broad legislation that restricts federal travel to and participation in these conferences and meetings. Such legislation, while a well-intentioned attempt to reduce the federal deficit, threatens to have the unintended consequences of restricting innovation and reducing America's global competitiveness.

ASHRAE, formed in 1894, is a building science and technology society. The Society and its members focus on building systems, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, refrigeration, and sustainability within the industry. Through research, standards writing, publishing and continuing education, ASHRAE shapes tomorrow's built environment today.

ASHRAE and its members interact with federal, state, tribal, and local governments in virtually all the work we do. The Society and its members are likewise directly impacted by the actions of these government entities. Consequently, in-depth interactions between federal personnel and ASHRAE members are critical to achieving ASHRAE's mission of advancing the arts and sciences of heating, ventilating, air conditioning and refrigerating to serve humanity and promote a sustainable world. Notably, many government employees are members of ASHRAE, serving on and otherwise participating with our technical committees, councils, chapters, and other entities. These groups facilitate the generation and dissemination of best practices that improve the knowledge and skills of public and private sector workers alike.

It is clear that reducing the deficit and debt are national priorities, however overly broad legislation that restricts federal travel to and participation in technical private sector conferences and meetings may in reality do more harm than good. This is because the face-to-face interactions that occur at these meetings contribute to improvements in energy efficiency, indoor air quality, and other areas. These conferences also provide unique opportunities for public and private sector workers to network with their colleagues and learn from industry leaders how to overcome challenging problems.

In summary:

- Face-to-face technical private sector meetings and conferences help the federal government function more effectively and efficiently by creating a more highly skilled federal workforce, making better use of taxpayer dollars.
- Technical meetings help the federal government to be in close touch with the American people and industries they regulate and affect, facilitating a well-functioning representative democracy.
- Without the exchange of ideas that occurs at these meetings, both the private and public sectors are deprived of the development of best practices, new approaches, and innovative solutions that help America stay globally competitive.
- Technical meetings have historically provided a forum for sharing knowledge, developing best practices, and advancing the arts and sciences that have fueled the growth and resilience of the U.S. economy. Although technology has taken large steps towards improving remote meeting participation, at present there is no substitute for the rich interactions that occur when all federal employees are encouraged to attend technical conferences in-person. Anything less threatens to harm the public-private relationship that has proven so important for our nation.

We look forward to working with you on this matter for the benefit of all. Please feel free to contact Doug Read, ASHRAE Director of Government Affairs, at [dread@ashrae.org](mailto:dread@ashrae.org) or 202-833-1830.

Sincerely,



William Bahnfleth  
ASHRAE President Society Year 2013-2014



*Public and Scientific Affairs Board*

January 13, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6250

Re: Hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

Dear Senator Carper:

The American Society for Microbiology (ASM) would like to submit comments for the record concerning the importance of federal government employees' participation in research, public health and educational conferences and other types of external meetings within the scientific community.

The ASM is the largest single life science membership organization in the world with more than 39,000 members. The Society's mission is to advance microbiological sciences through the pursuit of scientific knowledge and dissemination of the results of fundamental and applied research.

The ASM supports the intent of Congress to enhance transparency and accountability in federal agency spending. The Society is concerned, however, that restrictive travel policies will seriously curtail the opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas and the valuable educational opportunities that conferences and meetings provide the scientific community. The participation of federal employees in such conferences is invaluable to the advancement of science and the public interest.

The participation of federally employed scientists in professional meetings allows them to interact with colleagues from universities and industry and facilitates the exchange of knowledge that is essential to their jobs, innovation and the national interest. The purpose of scientific conferences and meetings is to allow communication across industry, academia and government. Conferences also allow young professionals to present their research and to access the knowledge and expertise of senior investigators. The role that scientific meetings play in the professional development of scientists and the advancement of disciplines is critically important to the Nation's interests and to scientific progress.

The absence of government employees at scientific meetings hinders scientific progress on which the US economy, our national security, and the health of the American and global population depend. The ASM has a major national conference on biodefense and emerging diseases that is critical for the development of countermeasures to protect the military and civilians against bioterrorism and newly emerging pathogens. Last year, scientists from the United States Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) were unable to attend the meeting even though it was held in Washington, DC and that has had a potentially negative impact on US preparedness.

We urge Congress and the Administration to place a high priority on scientific research and not to adopt restrictive policies that impede the ability of government scientists to participate in professional meetings and conferences. To do so will have a negative impact on US science. We appreciate the opportunity to provide a statement for the hearing record and would be pleased to assist the Committee in any way possible as it deliberates on government travel issues.

Sincerely,

Jeffery Miller, Ph.D., President, ASM

Ronald M. Atlas, Ph.D., Chair  
Public and Scientific Affairs Board

I am an ASM member and chair of the PSAB Environmental Microbiology Committee. From 1990 to 1997, I worked for the U.S. Department of Energy as a scientific program manager. I fully agree with the letter written by ASM and sincerely believe that it is incumbent on agencies and their contractors to allow, indeed encourage, their scientists and scientific program managers to attend scientific conferences and meetings. "The role that scientific meetings plays in the professional development of scientists and the advancement of disciplines is critically important to the Nation's interests and to scientific progress." The PIs that I funded while at DOE always knew much more about their research than did I and it was always beneficial to me, to DOE and to the Nation to attend scientific conferences and meetings and learn about what was being done to further scientific progress and to learn about needs. Accordingly, I agree with ASM and "urge Congress and the Administration to place a high priority on scientific research and not to adopt restrictive policies that impede the ability of government scientists to participate in professional meetings and conferences."

Sincerely,

Jay Grimes

D. Jay Grimes, Ph.D., FAAM, FAAAS  
Professor of Marine Microbiology  
<http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/microbiology>





American Society for Nutrition  
*Excellence in Nutrition Research and Practice*

January 24, 2014

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
 Washington DC 20515

Re: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

Dear Members of the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee:

As you examine the issue of federal conference and travel spending and the progress made on oversight, the American Society for Nutrition (ASN) respectfully shares with you our concerns regarding limiting government scientist participation in scientific conferences hosted by non-profit, professional societies such as ASN. ASN has more than 5,000 members, including government scientists who conduct research to help all Americans live healthier lives, and is dedicated to bringing together the world's top researchers to advance our knowledge and application of nutrition.

ASN encourages the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee to allow greater flexibility for government scientists to participate in conferences hosted by non-profit, professional societies. ASN also requests that you allow federal support for scientific, mission-relevant conferences and allow federal agencies to host meetings that advance the national research agenda. Such conferences are a standard way for scientists to communicate and share the most up-to-date research findings with one another. Online avenues limit in-person interaction and networking that is vital to advance discovery and innovation in the field of nutrition.

Travel restrictions limit the ability of government scientists to share and receive feedback on their own work at conferences, alert new audiences to agency funding opportunities and policies, and monitor the implementation of new research programs. Conferences help government scientists stay abreast of new developments in nutrition research and determine how best to allocate government resources to support research that will have the greatest impact on the health of Americans. Conferences also provide agency staff with an opportunity to meet new collaborators whom they might recruit to the workforce, to serve on advisory panels, grant reviews, and study sections, or to present research findings at events convened by the government.

In conclusion, while ASN supports efforts to promote federal agency transparency, accountability, and efficient spending, limiting government scientist's abilities to participate in conferences has long-term repercussions for the wellbeing of all Americans. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Please contact Sarah Ohlhorst, Director of Government Relations (sohlhorst@nutrition.org; 301.634.7281) if ASN may provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Gordon L. Jensen, M.D., Ph.D.  
 2013-2014 President

9650 Rockville Pike | Bethesda, MD 20814  
 T: 301.634.7050 | F: 301.634.7892  
 info@nutrition.org | www.nutrition.org

STATEMENT BY  
**LTG GUY C. SWAN, USA (RET)**  
**VICE PRESIDENT**  
**ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY**

SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO  
**SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY &**  
**GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

United States Senate

113<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

**Hearing: Examining Conference and Travel Spending**  
**Across the Federal Government**

JANUARY 14, 2014

Messrs. Chairmen and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) conference spending and the importance of attendance by federal employees at association conferences and symposia.

The Association of the United States Army is a diverse non-profit educational association of almost 100,000 members – active duty, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Department of the Army civilians, retirees and family members in 121 chapter worldwide.

AUSA fully supports congressional efforts to increase transparency and accountability in government spending and, indeed, the panels and forums in our larger events are either live-streamed or posted on our website after the fact. However, recent legislative proposals, while designed to limit spending on government-sponsored conferences and travel expenses, would actually have a chilling effect on government employees' participation in non-governmental meetings and conferences.

Our association hosts multiple events each year at national, state and local levels. Participation by military and civilian leaders is essential to the national defense and educational purposes of these events. The dialogue that takes place at such meetings between the government and the private sector is essential to the development of informed policymaking.

In particular, the dialogue at AUSA symposia allows the armed services to explain their needs to industry and allows industry to provide insights and new ideas that are vital in an era of constrained resources. Limiting this contact could have dire consequences not only for our armed forces, but also for the industrial base. The dangers of government operating in a vacuum – with fewer opportunities to learn and exchange information with private industry in a conference, meeting or symposium setting – are too great to ignore. Public –private collaboration is essential to the process of crafting a strong national defense.

A case can be made that, in addition to the obvious value of industry/academia/federal agency information exchange, professional development and community outreach, association sponsorship can save money.

If you have hundreds of industry exhibits in one place, as AUSA does at its Annual Meeting, military personnel can save travel dollars and valuable time by visiting one place and meeting multiple industry representatives.

If travel and attendance rules are overly restrictive, agencies will not seek waivers because of the difficulty involved, then if federal workers cannot attend events, then professional development (AUSA's Annual Meeting includes 14 military forums and six professional development seminars) cannot occur, (in the case of our Annual Meeting) families cannot obtain valuable information provided in four family forums, and industry representatives cannot gain valuable insight from the very people who use their products in the field.

Further, if federal agency leaders and decision makers cannot attend, then industry representatives will not exhibit nor attend.

If attendance diminishes and events are cancelled a valuable opportunity for congressional members and staff to gain information and insight from panels and exhibits is lost and a cost effective opportunity for federal agency community outreach and recruiting is lost.

Finally, in the case of the AUSA Annual Meeting, if the event does not occur, then foreign military personnel, who use the event to purchase products, will lose the opportunity to increase foreign military sales.

AUSA believes that the Office of Management and Budget memo of May 11, 2012 provides sufficient guidelines and oversight that additional legislation is not necessary. They allow the dual goals of public-private partnership and good government to be achieved simultaneously without severing federal attendance at non-governmental meetings.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the members of the Association of the United States Army concerning this important topic.

AVMA



American Veterinary Medical Association

January 21, 2014

Governmental  
Relations Division  
1910 Sunderland Place, NW  
Washington, DC  
20036-1642  
phone 202.789.0007  
800.321.1473  
fax 202.842.4360

AVMA Headquarters  
1931 N. Meacham Rd.  
Suite 100  
Schaumburg, IL  
60173-4360  
phone 847.925.8070  
800.248.2862  
fax 847.925.1329  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Re: January 14, 2014, hearing entitled: "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

The American Veterinary Medical Association is a 501(c)(6) individual membership organization with more than 85,000 members worldwide, including federal veterinarians, dedicated to advancing the science and art of veterinary medicine, including its relationship to public health, biological science and agriculture.

The AVMA appreciates the committee's examination of the issue of internal federal conferences and the progress made on oversight. Federal agencies must judiciously use taxpayer funds for conference and travel spending. However, we also are concerned about the potential impact that any legislation or additional restrictions prohibiting travel would have on the relationship between federal employees and the private sector at association conferences.

It is essential for federal veterinarians to have the opportunity to hear from the experts in their field and to provide a bridge between the federal government and the veterinary profession. Federal veterinarians participate in the AVMA's councils, committees and House of Delegates in an advisory capacity, and many federal veterinarians and employees attend AVMA's Annual Convention and Business Meeting as advisers, speakers and participants in the continuing education sessions we offer to our members. Because the AVMA supports many federal programs and activities, coordination and collaboration at meetings and conferences provides an important and valuable service to the federal government.

The AVMA supports the American Society of Association Executive's work with Congress and the Office of Management and Budget to ensure that any response to the inappropriately lavish conferences that were discussed at the January 14 hearing would not harm the ability of federal veterinarians to attend legitimate and necessary meetings and conferences held by the private sector.

The AVMA and the association community provide valuable communication, education and training to many federal employees. From the AVMA's perspective, this interaction is essential to maintain the health and welfare of our nation's animals, as well as its people.

Please feel free to contact me (202-289-3205; [mlutschaunig@avma.org](mailto:mlutschaunig@avma.org)) if you have any questions, or would like additional information about how the AVMA works with federal veterinarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark T. Lutschaunig, VMD, MBA". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mark T. Lutschaunig, VMD, MBA  
Director  
Governmental Relations Division

Testimony for the Record

for

Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs

Examining Conference and Travel Spending  
Across the Federal Government

by

Scott Melville

President and CEO

Consumer Healthcare Products Association  
(CHPA)

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA) was established in 1881 and is the U.S.-based industry trade organization that represents leading manufacturers and suppliers of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and dietary supplement products (such as multivitamin/minerals, fiber supplements, calcium supplements). Products produced by CHPA member companies provide millions of Americans with safe, effective, and convenient therapies for the treatment and prevention of many common ailments and diseases.

CHPA is committed to promoting the increasingly vital role of OTC medicines and dietary supplements in America's healthcare system through science, education, and advocacy. The association provides leadership and guidance on regulatory and scientific issues to Congress; state legislatures; and federal, state, and international government agencies. CHPA shares tools and information with partners across the globe to ensure the safe and responsible use of OTC medicines.

For over five decades, CHPA has hosted annual conferences devoted to regulatory, scientific and quality issues facing the self-care industry. Our conferences are planned with input from U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) staff to ensure that program topics are relevant to regulators and the regulated industry alike. High-level speakers from industry, FDA, U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and outside experts from academia and the private sector from around the world have presented at the recent meetings. Our meetings are held in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area to minimize meeting travel expenses for governmental attendees; our typical audience totals approximately 250 people including 50 from the FDA.

Each year the planning committee develops program content that highlights current issues related to OTC medicines and dietary supplement products—self-care products used daily by consumers. Objectives are set for each session to ensure that audience members, including those from governmental organizations, not only learn about the subject matter but can also apply the information to their daily work responsibilities. Regardless of the final conference theme and session topics chosen annually, the consumer remains the focal point of the event as regulators and industry continually strive to ensure that consumers have safe and appropriate access to self-care products.

Further, the dialogue that takes place at these meetings between FDA officials and the private sector is essential to the development of informed policymaking that facilitates consumer safety, consumer access to important medicine, economic growth and job creation. These are rare opportunities for both the FDA and our member companies to engage for extended discussion on issues on the horizon for both parties.

In organizing these conferences over the past 50 years, CHPA planning committees also seek to invite forward-thinking speakers outside of the FDA who can provide insights into future trends, scientific research, and regulatory initiatives in the self-care product sector. This provides a true educational opportunity for FDA officials. For example, in 2010, the CHPA Regulatory & Scientific Conference (RSC) showcased scientific research on probiotics, which are regulated as dietary supplement products in the U.S. As a result of a session at the 2012 RSC on OTC medicine use in the aging population, CHPA and the Gerontological Society of America (GSA)

cohosted a one-day National Summit on OTC Medication-Taking Behaviors of Older Adults in April 2013. The event drew more than 40 organizations together to evaluate current research on OTC medication behaviors of older adults and prioritize research needs. Furthermore, the 2012 RSC included presentations by FDA's Patrick Frey and UCLA's Eric, Brass, M.D., Ph.D., on potential approaches for assessing the benefit/risk profile of nonprescription medicines. Nearly two years later, on January 10, 2014, FDA issued a *Federal Register* notice announcing a public workshop on characterizing and communicating uncertainty in the assessment of benefits and risks in drug regulatory decision-making<sup>[1]</sup>. CHPA is hopeful that proposals highlighted at the 2012 RSC will be the subject of further discussion and/or expanded during this upcoming workshop.

Other organizations (governmental and non-governmental) also offer meetings that are excellent educational opportunities for FDA staff. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hosts an annual meeting in Atlanta, Ga., with CHPA, other non-governmental organizations, and academics on its campus to share progress updates and future undertakings of the Preventing Overdose & Treatment Errors in Children Taskforce (PROTECT Initiative). At these symposia, initiative partners, members, and invited guests discuss developments in the areas of innovative safety packaging, efforts to standardize volumetric units for liquid medicines, and educational campaigns targeted at proper medicine storage. These programs, targeted at reducing medication overdosing in children, are important elements of the public health missions of both FDA and the CDC. Because PROTECT requires cross-functional expertise, it is critically important that key government employees be permitted to attend these meetings based on the judgment of their management.

As you can see from the above examples, these events are unique learning opportunities for staff from FDA and OTC and dietary supplement companies. These forums are also opportunities for the FDA and industry to collaborate on identifying current issues facing FDA, consumers and industry as well as healthcare issues of the future. This is particularly important due to staff turnover at the FDA resulting in the need for local educational opportunities.

CHPA applauds your efforts to ensure greater transparency and accountability in government spending and agrees that exorbitant or wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars should not be tolerated. We ask that true opportunities for education and collaboration for federal employees remain allowable and that any action you may take on this issue not have a chilling effect on government employees' participation in non-governmental meetings and conferences that truly benefit all parties—most importantly, the American public.

Thank you for your consideration of the work that CHPA is doing on behalf of the OTC industry and consumers of OTC medicines. We look forward to working with you on this issue. Please contact me should you have any additional questions.

---

<sup>[1]</sup> FDA Characterizing and Communicating Uncertainty in the Assessment of Benefits and Risks in Drug Regulatory Decision-Making. 79 *Fed. Reg.* 1877-1879 (10 January 2014). Docket No. FDA-2013-N-1658.



**Comments for the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs  
Committee Concerning Government Conference Travel**

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the issue of government employee conference attendance. CMI, Inc. is an association management company whose association clients comprise over 15,000 members. Our associations are proven, cost effective sources of education, training and professional development. They hold annual and regional conferences, and a significant number of government and military employees attend these conferences.

CMI supports the intent of Congress to increase transparency and accountability in government spending. There is no reason for exorbitant or wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars in any government agency, office or activity, just as there is no reason for that in the association management business. However, we respectfully urge the Congress to consider revisions to amendments passed in two separate bills passed last April 25 by the House and Senate, should the opportunity arise. These amendments place severe restrictions on government employees attending meetings and conferences. The amendments were included in the "Digital Accountability and Transparency Act" or DATA Act (H.R. 2146) in the House, and the "21st Century Postal Service Act" (S. 1789) in the Senate.

While the amendments are designed to limit spending on government-sponsored conferences and travel expenses for federal employees, the actual language would have a troubling effect on government employees' participation in non-governmental meetings and conferences. At CMI we have seen firsthand the benefits that government employees, particularly VA and DoD nurses and case managers, take away from the conferences we provide. The educational opportunities and the dialogue that takes place at these meetings between government employees and private sector healthcare experts and the other conferees are extremely valuable for these VA and DoD case managers and nurses - and as importantly, for the patients they go back to. The drawbacks of government employees having fewer opportunities to learn and exchange information with private industries in a conference or meeting setting are too significant to ignore.

The language in either of these amendments could be easily modified to allow federal employees to attend educational conferences held by associations and other non-governmental organizations, without compromising Congress's goal of enhanced federal accountability.

Suggested modifications include:

- Section 1(D) defines “conference” as a meeting “sponsored by 1 or more agencies, 1 or more organizations that are not agencies, or a combination of such agencies or organizations.” This definition would encompass every conference held by an association, corporation or virtually any other non-governmental organization. Our suggestion is to revise this definition to a meeting “sponsored by one or more agencies.”
- The final section of the amendment, Section 4, limits any agency from expending funds on “more than a single conference sponsored or organized by an organization during any fiscal year, unless the agency is the primary sponsor and organizer of the conference.” This provision is highly problematic for agency employees seeking education from non-governmental sources and for the associations and other private sector organizations that invite government employees to conferences. A reasonable reading of this provision would mean that if employees of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) attended a scientific conference sponsored by a medical association, no other employees of the Department of Health and Human Services could attend any other conference held by that same association for the remainder of the fiscal year. Our suggestion would be to strike this final provision from the amendment.

The provisions noted above have broad implications for associations and other non-governmental organizations that invite government employees to give presentations or attend their conferences. Without modifications, the provisions would discourage government attendance at educational conferences and hinder the necessary interchange between government and the private sector. For these reasons, we hope you will keep in mind the distinction between government agency conferences and association conferences, and we respectfully ask you to revise either amendment as recommended above should the opportunity arise. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Cheri A. Lattimer, RN, BSN  
President and CEO



Case Management Society of America  
 6301 Ranch Drive | Little Rock, AR 72223  
 T 501.225.2229 F 501.221.9068 E cmsa@cmsa.org  
 www.cmsa.org

### Comments to the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee Concerning Government Conference Travel

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the issue of government employee conference attendance. The Case Management Society of America is an association with over 10,000 members involved in case management, nursing, and other healthcare activities. CMSA is a proven, cost effective source of education, training and professional development for our members. We hold annual and regional conferences, and a significant number of government and military employees attend these conferences.

CMSA supports the intent of Congress to increase transparency and accountability in government spending. There is no reason for exorbitant or wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars in any government agency, office or activity, just as there is no reason for that at an association. However, we respectfully urge the Congress to consider revisions to amendments passed in two separate bills passed last April 25 by the House and Senate, should the opportunity arise. These amendments place severe restrictions on government employees attending meetings and conferences. The amendments were included in the "Digital Accountability and Transparency Act" or DATA Act (H.R. 2146) in the House, and the "21st Century Postal Service Act" (S. 1789) in the Senate.

While the amendments are designed to limit spending on government-sponsored conferences and travel expenses for federal employees, the actual language would have a troubling effect on government employees' participation in non-governmental meetings and conferences. At CMSA we have seen firsthand the benefits that government employees, particularly VA and DoD nurses and case managers, take away from the conferences we provide. The educational opportunities and the dialogue that takes place at these meetings between government employees and private sector healthcare experts and the other conferees are extremely valuable for these VA and DoD case managers and nurses - and as importantly, for the patients they go back to. The drawbacks of government employees having fewer opportunities to learn and exchange information with private industries in a conference or meeting setting are too significant to ignore.

The language in either of these amendments could be easily modified to allow federal employees to attend educational conferences held by associations and other non-governmental organizations, without compromising Congress's goal of enhanced federal accountability.

PUBLIC POLICY

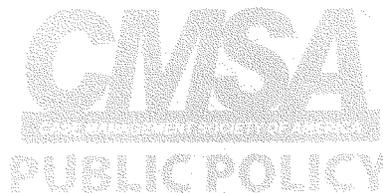
Suggested modifications include:

- Section 1(D) defines "conference" as a meeting "sponsored by 1 or more agencies, 1 or more organizations that are not agencies, or a combination of such agencies or organizations." This definition would encompass every conference held by an association, corporation or virtually any other non-governmental organization. Our suggestion is to revise this definition to a meeting "sponsored by one or more agencies."
- The final section of the amendment, Section 4, limits any agency from expending funds on "more than a single conference sponsored or organized by an organization during any fiscal year, unless the agency is the primary sponsor and organizer of the conference." This provision is highly problematic for agency employees seeking education from non-governmental sources and for the associations and other private sector organizations that invite government employees to conferences. A reasonable reading of this provision would mean that if employees of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) attended a scientific conference sponsored by a medical association, no other employees of the Department of Health and Human Services could attend any other conference held by that same association for the remainder of the fiscal year. Our suggestion would be to strike this final provision from the amendment.

The provisions noted above have broad implications for associations and other non-governmental organizations that invite government employees to give presentations or attend their conferences. Without modifications, the provisions would discourage government attendance at educational conferences and hinder the necessary interchange between government and the private sector. For these reasons, we hope you will keep in mind the distinction between government agency conferences and association conferences, and we respectfully ask you to revise either amendment as recommended above should the opportunity arise. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Nancy Skinner, RN-BC, CCM  
President, CMSA



The leading membership association providing professional collaboration across the health care continuum.  
Case Management Society of America | 6301 Ranch Drive | Little Rock, AR 72223 T 501.225.2229 F 501.221.9068 E  
cmsa@cmsa.org



3 Park Place, Suite 307  
Annapolis, MD 21401-3722 USA

Phone: 301-731-4535  
Fax: 301-731-4538

esa@entsoc.org  
www.entsoc.org

January 17, 2014

The Honorable Tom Carper  
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
100 Constitution Avenue, NE  
Room 340  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
2 Constitution Avenue, NE  
Room 172  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

As the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee considers the current state of travel spending across the federal government, the Entomological Society of America (ESA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the effect of federal travel policies on the scientific enterprise. ESA supports appropriate oversight and transparency of federal employee conference participation and travel expenditures to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse. However, **ESA urges the Committee to consider how current policies have unintentionally restricted productive interactions among government, industry, and academic entomologists, thereby hindering scientific progress critical to our nation's health, agriculture, security, and economic prosperity.**

With nearly 7,000 members affiliated with academic institutions, health agencies, private industry, and state and federal governments, ESA is the largest organization in the world serving the professional and scientific needs of entomologists and individuals in related disciplines. As the premier event of the society, the ESA Annual Meeting is the largest meeting for insect scientists in the world. The meeting provides a unique opportunity for a wide swath of the entomology community – including federal scientists and practitioners working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. military, among other federal agencies – to come together to discuss the latest research findings, exchange ideas, and form professional networks for collaborative projects and prospective employment. **The ESA Annual Meeting is the premier forum in the United States where entomologists can interact face-to-face to exchange ideas and explore new ones; this kind of interaction is invaluable, and research advancements in entomology are hindered when federal scientists are unable to participate.**

By attending the ESA Annual Meeting, federal employees can make valuable professional contacts, update their technical skills, and present their research, all of which are activities that serve to enrich their scientific expertise in areas that advance American agriculture, protect the environment, and keep American citizens and soldiers safe from insect-borne diseases. For example, entomologists study insects and other arthropods that spread West Nile virus, malaria, Lyme disease, and dengue. In addition, the ability to better monitor the invasive insect species that devastate crops, protect the beneficial insect species that serve as pollinators, and control the insect pests that significantly damage infrastructure has important implications for the entire American economy. Because each entomological sector approaches these scientific challenges from a different perspective, it is in our national interest to foster innovative collaborations across the entire enterprise of entomology.

Scientific conferences, such as the ESA Annual Meeting, also provide important career development opportunities. At the ESA Meeting, students and other early-career entomologists are able to interact with leaders in their field, gain experience presenting their data, develop a better knowledge of the larger scientific

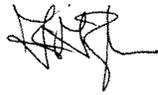
landscape, and network with potential future employers and career mentors. Participation by federal scientists in scientific meetings is a key component to training the future science and technology workforce for the public and private sectors.

**Given the importance of entomology research, extension, and education to our nation's federal science and technology priorities and capabilities, we encourage you to support policies that ensure appropriate oversight without disadvantaging entomologists and other scientists, including those who serve our country as federal employees.** The freedom to share ideas, collaborate, and discuss new advances in research is a hallmark of U.S. leadership in scientific innovation and should be encouraged rather than stifled.

Thank you for considering these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact ESA if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Frank Zalom, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Zalom', with a stylized flourish at the end.

President, Entomological Society of America  
Professor of Entomology, University of California, Davis



Ecological Society of America  
1990 M Street, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20036

---

January 13, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Carper  
Chairman  
Senate Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member  
Senate Homeland Security and  
Government Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

On behalf of the Ecological Society of America (ESA), the world's largest professional society of ecologists, I write to convey the importance of continued federal participation in scientific conferences.

Amid existing federal spending constraints where research and development investment has declined, we appreciate the desire to ensure federal dollars are spent judiciously. We agree that it is important our nation has the capability to match public investment in scientific research with other countries in order to maintain global competitiveness abroad in addition to furthering economic development at home.

However, as policymakers review efforts related to transparency and government travel for federal employees, we ask that you consider the valuable role scientific conferences play in fostering the open exchange of scientific information in not just the professional education and development of federal employees, but for all involved parties. The exchange of information at such conferences between federal employees, industry representatives, students, teachers and practitioners serves as a vital conduit in conveying science from a multitude of disciplines. The loss of one of these critical perspectives creates a knowledge gap that hinders the capability of all the others to apply their research effectively.

Each year, ESA holds an annual meeting at the convention center of a major city attracting several thousand registrants from the region and across the country, representing all major fields of ecology. The study of ecology alone includes research into agriculture, bioenergy, environmental sustainability, invasive species, fish and wildlife, and land management and water resources. These are areas of interest to virtually every cross section of human society. Collectively, this venue allows scientists from federal and state governments, academia, nonprofit organizations and industry to present their research in a manner that fosters collaboration and advances knowledge for everyone involved.

Maintaining the freedom of federal employees to collaborate in a public forum with researchers representing academia, nonprofit organizations and industry is critical to keeping America at the forefront in scientific discovery and innovation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine S. McCarter" followed by a horizontal flourish.

Katherine McCarter  
Executive Director



*Representing Over 115,000 Researchers*

301.634.7000  
www.faseb.org

9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Testimony of the

**Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology**

On

**Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government**

Submitted to the

**Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**January 14, 2014**

Senator Thomas Carper, Chairman  
Senator Tom Coburn, Ranking Member

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) writes to share its thoughts with the Committee as it oversees current and future policies related to federal agency spending on conferences and travel. As a federation of 26 scientific societies, FASEB represents more than 115,000 researchers, making it the largest coalition of biomedical research associations in the United States. FASEB's mission is to advance health and welfare by promoting progress and education in biological and biomedical sciences through service to its member societies and collaborative advocacy. FASEB enhances the ability of scientists and engineers to improve—through their research—the health, well-being, and productivity of all people.

FASEB supports the efficient and responsible use of federal resources, and appreciates the role that carefully crafted regulations play in ensuring that the public trust is not abused. We are concerned, however, that the current restrictions on travel imposed by President Obama's Executive Order 13589 ("Promoting Efficient Spending") and Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-12-12 are impeding the ability of federal employees to carry out their duties. An excessive limitation on the ability of federal employees to participate in crucial meetings and conferences hinders scientific collaborations and interferes with effective agency oversight of federal research programs.

**Sparking Collaboration and Innovation**

Scientific and technological innovation is increasingly a joint effort between government, industry, and academia. Conferences facilitate collaborations among researchers who may not otherwise have the opportunity to interact. They provide a forum to present research findings, learn about cutting-edge advancements in the field, and receive feedback from colleagues on current and planned projects. This collaborative process guides scientists toward the most promising research trajectories.

---

The American Physiological Society • American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology • American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics  
American Society for Investigative Pathology • American Society for Nutrition • The American Association of Immunologists • American Association of Anatomists  
The Protein Society • Society for Developmental Biology • American Peptide Society • Association of Biomolecular Resource Facilities  
The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research • American Society for Clinical Investigation • Society for the Study of Reproduction • The Teratology Society  
The Endocrine Society • The American Society of Human Genetics • International Society for Computational Biology • American College of Sports Medicine  
Biomedical Engineering Society • Genetics Society of America • American Federation for Medical Research • The Histochemical Society • Society for Pediatric Research  
Society for Glycobiology • Association for Molecular Pathology

**Facilitating Communication Between Agency Staff and the Scientific Community**

By attending scientific meetings, funding agency staff provide valuable information and other services to the research community. They may participate in sessions to alert meeting participants to new funding opportunities or solicit input about agency policies. Conferences also offer a dedicated venue to translate and disseminate scientific discoveries to new audiences, a fundamental goal of the government science agencies.

Typical scientific conferences range in attendance from a few hundred to thousands of attendees, with multiple forms of presentations, including plenary talks, symposia, and poster sessions. The depth and breadth of discussion and numbers of people involved usually cannot adequately be captured using electronic forms of communication or video conferencing.

**Maximizing the Efficiency of Agency Oversight**

Attendance at conferences and meetings is often the most cost-effective way for agency staff to exercise their oversight of federal research dollars. Learning about scientific developments helps program officers and other agency staff monitor the implementation of ongoing as well as new research programs, identify unmet needs, share information with the community about additional funding opportunities and areas of research, and review policies. Additionally, staff who attend meetings can help inform agency leadership of emerging trends in research to facilitate the development of the agency's portfolio. This is an essential perspective for those charged with responsibility for determining how best to allocate government research resources.

**Ensuring the Quality of the Federal Workforce**

Participation in scientific meetings and symposia enables researchers to continue their professional education. If government scientists and agency staff are not able to attend conferences, their ability to keep up with new developments in their areas of expertise will be hampered. Further, the ability of government agencies to attract top quality researchers to a career in government will be impeded.

FASEB supports travel policies that ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars without inadvertently impairing the ability of federal science agencies to complete their mission and advance the national research agenda. Current practices are prohibiting too many federal employees from attending meetings that are essential for the execution of their duties.

FASEB thanks the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.



9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20814-3998  
Phone: (301) 634-7300 • Fax: (301) 634-7079  
society@genetics-gsa.org  
www.genetics-gsa.org

**Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
on conference and travel spending across the federal government**

**Submitted by the Genetics Society of America  
January 29, 2014**

We are pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Genetics Society of America (GSA), a professional scientific society with more than 5,000 members worldwide working to deepen our understanding of the living world by advancing the field of genetics.

Among other activities, the Society sponsors several international scientific conferences each year that bring scientists together to share cutting-edge research even before results are published in scientific journals. Indeed, conferences are a primary means for the scientific community to interact and are essential to the scientific enterprise. In addition to providing a venue for sharing and getting feedback on ongoing research, scientific meetings are a primary way to catalyze new connections and collaborations, especially opportunities to bring together experts from different areas of research. Many important insights have resulted from conversations at scientific meetings, which help enhance the efficiency of the research enterprise. As such, the only way to keep up-to-date on the latest scientific advances is by active participation in conferences. Meetings are also the most efficient way to learn about a new discipline, so they are especially critical for trainees who represent the future of our field. Indeed, many of our members pay out of pocket to attend conferences, indicating just how important these meetings are to their careers and to the advancement of science.

The Genetics Society of America is concerned about the unintended impacts of recent government restrictions on federal employee travel and conference sponsorship. While we share the concerns about extravagant spending that prompted these regulations and agree that federal agencies should be responsible stewards of public resources, we worry that agency actions are having a significant and negative effect on many appropriate and essential activities. The detrimental impact is especially pronounced on federal government employees—including both intramural researchers employed by federal agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and program directors who oversee the federal investment in scientific research—but the entire community suffers.

In this testimony, we highlight some of the ways these regulations are being experienced in the community. We believe that the new restrictions are leading to a reduction in efficiency and a reduced return on the nation's investment in research.

Government employees often experience significant delays in receiving approval to travel to scientific conferences, including those we host. These federal workers generally are required to initiate their travel requests six to nine months in advance, which is often well before the scientific program for the meeting is set. That means government scientists must request approval to attend a meeting before knowing what will be discussed, or even if their own presentation will be accepted.

As one example, NIH scientists must have their travel approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), meaning the decisions are made by offices far removed from the science that would be presented at the meeting. The Department imposes a cap on attendance to a given meeting across HHS, and these strict limits on attendance apply to even large and broad meetings that justifiably engage many scientists across the entire Department. Our members are making decisions on which meetings to attend based not only on the quality of the research being presented, but on the likelihood of receiving approval. We understand that some government scientists have even been declining speaking invitations and the opportunity to share their research because of the worry that approvals will not come through. We have also learned of instances when previously approved travel plans were cancelled at the last minute because of constantly changing policies. This shifting landscape for approvals is severely disruptive to the scientific enterprise and wasteful in time and resources.

Even when requesting travel approval many months in advance, government scientists often will not receive authorization until just before the meeting. This means that federal employees are forced to delay submitting their conference registration or making travel arrangements until the last minute. As a result, taxpayers are often forced to pay higher registration and travel costs because meeting attendees cannot take advantage of discounts for planning ahead—and conference sessions and lodging options can be sold out by the time they receive approval. Although meeting organizers like our Society will work to accommodate our federal colleagues to the extent possible, we must also devote more time and effort, leading to additional costs and uncertainty. Indeed, we are not even sure that one of the chief organizers for a large meeting we are hosting in 2014 will receive travel approval to attend the meeting she is organizing!

Our members have reported numerous examples of scientists employed by government agencies who have attended Genetics Society of America conferences in the past being unable to do so at all this past year because of the overly stringent approval process. Although we recognize the need for appropriate oversight, restrictions on federal employee travel are cutting government scientists off from the rest of the research community. This means not only that federal researchers will have a more difficult time keeping up with cutting-edge science, but also that the wider scientific community will miss the opportunity to learn about advances happening in government laboratories. Federal employees must also decline any speaking invitations extended after the approval deadline for a particular conference, further isolating them from the rest of the community.

The program directors who oversee federal research investments have also been unable to attend key conferences in the areas of research they sponsor. This means that they are less informed about

current breakthroughs and the latest scientific advances. They are also less accessible to the research community, which is an important responsibility for agency officials. One of our members shared the story of a symposium she helped organize at a major international scientific conference this past year. Even though the symposium was supported by an NIH conference grant, the responsible program officer overseeing the grant was not given permission to attend, nor was any other representative of NIH or the National Science Foundation (NSF), even though this was a major meeting for many NIH and NSF grantees. How can we expect agency officials to be responsible stewards of public funds if they cannot keep up with the latest research developments?

We have also learned of unfortunate effects on early-career scientists including graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. For example, several of our members at NIH have reported situations where they have been unable to send trainees to conferences, which are an essential part of their professional development as well as an opportunity to share their research. Scientific meetings are also a primary mechanism for trainees to connect with potential employers and mentors, which can help advance their career progression. NIH has also had difficulty at bringing in candidates for research positions, compromising the ability of NIH to recruit top scientists.

Finally, the Genetics Society of America would like to emphasize the detrimental effect that these regulations are having on the morale of scientists employed by federal agencies. These new restrictions are preventing government scientists from being full and active participants in the scientific community. We worry about the increasing difficulty federal agencies will have in recruiting top scientists to careers in government.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into your deliberations about government support for travel and conferences. We would be happy to provide any additional information about the impact of these regulations on our community and the advancement of genetics research. Please contact GSA's Executive Director, Adam P. Fagen, PhD (301-634-7300; [afagen@genetics-gsa.org](mailto:afagen@genetics-gsa.org)), with any questions.



**ABOUT GSA:** Founded in 1931, the Genetics Society of America (GSA) is a professional scientific society with more than 5,000 members worldwide working to deepen our understanding of the living world by advancing the field of genetics, from the molecular to the population level. GSA promotes research and fosters communication through GSA-sponsored international conferences including regular meetings that focus on particular model organisms. GSA publishes two peer-edited scholarly journals: *GENETICS*, which has published high quality original research across the breadth of the field since 1916, and *Genes|Genomes|Genetics*, an open-access journal launched in 2011 to disseminate high quality foundational research in genetics and genomics. The Society also has a deep commitment to education and fostering the next generation of scholars in the field. For more information about GSA, please visit [www.genetics-gsa.org](http://www.genetics-gsa.org). Also follow GSA on Facebook at [facebook.com/GeneticsGSA](https://www.facebook.com/GeneticsGSA) and on Twitter @GeneticsGSA.

---

Testimony of the  
**Geological Society of America**  
Regarding the  
**U.S. Senate**  
**Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing**  
**Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government**

January 28, 2014

The Geological Society of America is pleased to submit testimony for the record on the benefits of scientific conferences. The Geological Society of America (GSA), founded in 1888, is a scientific society with more than 26,000 members from academia, government, and industry in more than 100 countries. Through its meetings, publications, and programs, GSA enhances the professional growth of its members and promotes the geosciences in the service of humankind.

We recognize that Congress has a responsibility to prevent wasteful government spending. We are concerned, however, that current restrictions impede the free flow of scientific information and advancement as well as the professional development of scientists and engineers that is needed to solve critical issues to our Nation ranging from earthquake research, to floods and droughts, to mineral and energy resources.

Through GSA conferences, scientists keep informed of the latest discoveries in their field and build new collaborations through the formal presentation of peer-reviewed research and discussions with their contemporaries. The interactions that occur at conferences are crucial to scientists' ability foster new collaborations for future study.

Many federal scientists who had planned to present their research had to withdraw from GSA meetings this year. This resulted in federally-funded research that was not as broadly disseminated and opportunities for collaborations missed. At one of GSA's section meetings, the meeting chair estimated that 5-7% of scheduled talks were submitted by federal scientists who were ultimately unable to present.

---

SCIENCE • STEWARDSHIP • SERVICE

3300 Penrose Place, P.O. Box 9140, Boulder, Colorado 80301-9140 USA • Tel 303.357.1000, Fax 303.357.1070 •  
[www.geosociety.org](http://www.geosociety.org)

We would like to highlight an impact cited at the hearing by OMB Deputy Director for Management Beth Cobert that the travel limits will have a larger impact on junior employees. We hear from GSA members that many young federal scientists are bearing the brunt of the cutbacks in travel, which deprives them of opportunities to grow in the field and makes government service less appealing as a career choice.

The next generation of scientists is also affected by the lack of government scientists at meetings. Nearly one third of GSA's membership is students, and many attend our conferences. Through an array of educational programs, such as the Geology in Government Mentor program, students benefit from their interaction with professionals from academia, government, and industry. The diverse career paths of the scientists provide students with a broad perspective from which to pursue their studies and careers. When federal scientists cannot attend meetings, students are denied the chance to learn from experts in their field and learn about careers in government.

We urge you to recognize the important role scientific conferences play in advancing our understanding of the world and their contributions to scientific progress and innovation, in congressional efforts to ensure that federal money is well spent and properly documented.

**GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION**

• FAAMA • FMA • NCSSMA • PMA • SEA •

January 14, 2014

The Honorable Tom Carper  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
442 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

On behalf of the member organizations of the Government Managers Coalition (GMC), we write to express our concern with on-going attempts to place extreme restrictions on conference and travel spending, especially in light of the committee hearing today. Although questionable conference spending appears to have occurred in the past, there are legitimate purposes for conferences, meetings and travel which should not be cut due to alleged abuse by a few people.

As you know, the GMC consists of the five major federal sector executive and managerial professional associations representing over 200,000 executives and managers in the federal government. GMC works to advocate for good governance and policies throughout the federal workforce. As managers and executives across the government, we respect and agree with the idea that dollars are spent wisely and sufficient oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure effective government. However, following the conference spending scandals that occurred in the past at GSA and VA, attempts at oversight have been too broad and are actually limiting necessary government business and important opportunities for engagement with stakeholders.

Several pieces of legislation have been introduced to limit agency travel budgets to 70 or 80 percent of 2010 levels or put other limits and bans on conference and travel spending. While this may seem appropriate on its face, blanket reductions do not generally address the problem of mismanagement. Furthermore, budget pressures and the threat of further cuts have already had a chilling effect on agency travel budgets, rendering further cuts more harmful than effective.

Government conferences, meetings and trainings – some of which require travel – can serve many beneficial purposes. They bring experts together from academia and the public and

---

**GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION**


---

• FAAMA • FMA • NCCSMA • PMA • SEA •

---

private sectors, provide a forum for idea-sharing and collaboration on innovative projects, and dissemination and discussion of best practices. Further, many federal employees require certain training or certifications to effectively and efficiently do their jobs. For these positions, failure to maintain professional accreditation could result in a skills lapse, or worse, a loss of security clearance. Conferences, meetings and trainings also provide case law, regulatory, and practice updates so that employees in particular professions, such as human resources, are up to date on any changes.

Travel to conferences and other meetings is often necessary to meet these requirements as many agency training installations are located around the country. For example employees from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Social Security Administration (SSA) receive mission critical training and developmental opportunities at their meetings. In rapidly changing fields of science and technology, government professionals from agencies like NASA, NIH, DOD, USDA, and DHS benefit from knowledge exchange and networking opportunities with practitioners from private industry, academia, and state and local government.

The specific experiences of GMC member organizations highlight the pressure on legitimate meetings, conferences, and trainings. For example, at the Internal Revenue Service, training classes have been cut at the last minute and many employees have been told not to conduct outreach activities, roundtable discussions, or attend information sharing meetings. These are legitimate meetings that are cut at the expense of employee engagement, development, and efficient agency communication.

The GMC urges you to consider alternate ways to increase oversight of travel, meeting and conference spending. Rather than across-the-board budget cuts, each meeting, conference or travel request should be considered on a case by case basis. If the requested event fulfills requirements for training or certification, it should be approved. Agencies should be required to ensure that meetings and conferences sponsored by an agency follow strict policies – perhaps even capping limits on spending for certain promotional items or speakers. Any oversight mechanisms should be clear, straightforward, and government-wide. However, it is our experience that there is never a one size fits all policy and exceptions always exist. Agencies should have flexibility to determine what travel, meetings and conferences are a necessary expense. If additional oversight is required, agencies should be able to receive an opinion from OMB on whether certain spending is warranted.

As you continue to examine these issues, the GMC would also like to remind the committee that mechanisms are already in place to hold employees accountable. Where any improper spending did occur at GSA and VA, inspector general investigations identified improprieties and employees were held accountable. The GMC believes that weaknesses in the system are due more to a lack of training for managers in how to deal with problem employees and a lack of consistent support from political leadership. The GMC encourages you to consider investments in areas such as training instead of making the perhaps easier choice to cut budgets.

**GOVERNMENT MANAGERS COALITION**

• FAAMA • FMA • NCSSMA • PMA • SEA •

We offer our assistance in identifying areas of investment within agencies and we look forward to working with you to ensure dollars are spent wisely. Thank you for your continued interest in an effective and efficient federal workforce.

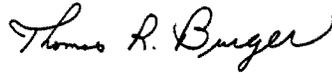
Sincerely,



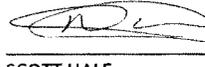
DAVID CONLEY  
President  
FAA Managers Association



PATRICIA J. NIEHAUS  
President  
Federal Managers Association



THOMAS R. BURGER  
Executive Director  
Professional Managers Association



SCOTT HALE  
President  
National Council of Social Security  
Management Associations



CAROL A. BONOSARO  
President  
Senior Executives Association

CC: Members of the Committee



The Honorable Tom Carper  
 Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
 513 Hart Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510

January 28, 2014

Dear Chairman Carper,

On behalf of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES), I write to express concerns with the travel restrictions on federal agency officials and how this affects their ability to attend scientific meetings. Current policies have led to unintentional restrictions on effective interactions between government, industry, and academia, thus restricting scientific progress. HFES appreciates your work and that of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to ensure federal spending is continuously monitored and scrutinized, especially in the current fiscal environment. Further, we appreciate your acknowledgment of the value of face to face meetings and the benefits that these interactions at scientific conferences bring to both the science community and to federal agencies.

With over 4,600 members, HFES is the world's largest nonprofit individual-member, multidisciplinary scientific association for human factors and ergonomics (HF/E) professionals. HFES members include psychologists and other scientists, designers, and engineers, including researchers, practitioners, and federal agency officials, all of whom have a common interest in working to develop safe, effective, and practical human use of technology, particularly in challenging settings.

The HFES Annual Meeting is the largest gathering of HF/E professionals in the world and provides the opportunity for face to face interactions to advance the field of HF/E across a number of areas. In 2013, attendance at the annual meeting decreased by approximately 20 percent due to travel restrictions, sequestration, and the government shutdown. Without the annual meeting and other direct interactions, federal agencies are missing opportunities to engage with leading experts in their field to ensure policy and related decisions are based on the latest scientific expertise. Federal researchers also have the opportunity to share their work with the community. Additionally, HFES has a large number of student and early career members. The HFES Annual Meeting provides an ideal opportunity for these members to interact with leaders in their field and to gain understanding of the real world issues in their field along with information on future career opportunities.

The field of HF/E impacts issues as diverse as transportation, architecture, environmental design, consumer products, electronics/computers, energy systems, medical devices, manufacturing, office automation, organizational design and management, aging, farming, health, sports and recreation, oil field operations, mining, forensics, and education. HF/E has applications across almost all federal agencies and the societies that those agencies impact. For this reason, it is vital that federal agency staff are able to attend relevant scientific meetings, both to ensure they are informed of the latest research and development, but also to share information with researchers and practitioners about agency needs.

P.O. Box 1369, Santa Monica, CA 90403-1369, USA  
 310/394-1811 • Fax 310/394-2410  
 Email: [info@hfes.org](mailto:info@hfes.org) Web site: <http://www.hfes.org>



We urge you to take these factors into account as your committee continues its work in this area. Specifically, we encourage you to protect the benefits of federal agency officials attending scientific meetings.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me at [frank.durso@gatech.edu](mailto:frank.durso@gatech.edu) or 404-894-6771. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Frank Durso  
President, Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)  
Professor of Psychology, Georgia Institute of Technology



33 West Monroe Street, Suite 1700  
Chicago, Illinois 60603-5616

tel 312 664 4467  
fax 312 664 6143

[www.himss.org](http://www.himss.org)

January 13, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chairperson  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper:

On behalf of the 52,000 members of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), we appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments for the record relevant to the Committee's January 14, 2014 hearing, "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government." As a cause-based, global enterprise producing health IT thought leadership around the world, HIMSS leads efforts to optimize health engagements and care outcomes using information technology. We believe it is critically important for federal employees to participate in public education and exhibition meetings to exchange ideas, learn about real-world issues and problems, listen to Americans, and gain valuable professional development and certification continuing education credits that professional conferences provide.

As an example, each year, the HIMSS Annual Conference & Exhibition engages over 35,000 participants from across the globe in timely dialogue on the current and future states of healthcare information and management systems to support healthcare transformation in the U.S. and around the world. The exchange of ideas and lessons learned make real time and programmatic improvements to important federal, state, and local policy on such programs as payment reform initiatives, the Medicare and Medicaid Electronic Health Record Incentive Program, EHR certification programs, quality improvement initiatives, and advancements in interoperability that enable information exchange across settings of care, different providers and payers, different vendor systems, and government and non-government systems.

This year HIMSS' Annual Conference & Exhibition (February 23-27, 2014) will include over 40 speakers from the federal government, and events focused on topics and programs of high interest to Americans that emanate from the Congressional and Federal branches of our nation's government. Federal agency involvement and interest in health IT and EHRs continues to become ever more a part of the national healthcare environment, including for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, veterans, military, Native Americans, and underserved communities.

The increasing complexity of the healthcare setting and need for interoperable technology solutions to support care coordination requires engagement by all stakeholders. Continuing the robust dialogue between federal government representatives and the national healthcare community affords policy makers the opportunity to listen to stakeholders' needs, concerns, and

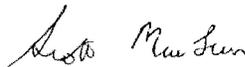
questions, and to provide clear guidance to stakeholders. This dialogue, education, and cross fertilization are critical to transforming healthcare in America.

In addition, federal government personnel have become increasingly active in certification programs that advance their professional development and benefit the individual, their agency, and ultimately the public programs they administer. HIMSS has a strong tradition of advancing professional development and certification through our in-person education sessions. Federal employees who are new to health IT are encouraged to obtain our Certified Associate in Healthcare Information and Management Systems (CAHIMS) certificate. Advanced health IT professionals seek the professional development certification known as the Certified Professional in Healthcare Information and Management Systems (CPHIMS). Many of our CAHIMS and CPHIMS colleagues maintain their certification through travel and participation at the annual meeting.

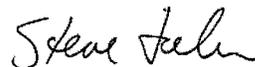
Finally, for nearly 20 years, since the passage of HIPAA in 1996, and subsequent legislative action on the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 and the HITECH provisions in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Congress has sent clear messages to the healthcare community that IT is an integral part of healthcare transformation in the U.S. With the passage of each of these laws, Congress has sought to ensure federal and non-federal healthcare delivery would be improved. It is imperative that *all* stakeholders, including federal policy makers and care delivery professionals, are integral to the continuing dialog guiding the nations' effort to meet this mandate.

We look forward to the hearing on January 14<sup>th</sup>, and request that these comments be included in the record, in support of federal employees being able to travel and participate in public meetings.

Sincerely,



Scott T. MacLean, MBA, CPHIMS, FHIMSS  
Chair, HIMSS Board of Directors  
Deputy CIO, Director of IS Operations  
Partners HealthCare, Boston



H. Stephen Lieber, CAE  
President/CEO  
HIMSS

cc: The Honorable Tom Coburn, Ranking Member,  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs



**Examining Conference and Travel Spending  
Across the Federal Government**

**Statement for the Record of  
Chief William R. Metcalf, EFO, CFO  
President and Chairman of the Board**

*presented to the*

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**United States Senate**

January 14, 2014

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS  
4025 FAIR RIDGE DRIVE • FAIRFAX, VA 22033-2868

Good morning, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and members of the committee. I am Chief William R. Metcalf, EFO, CFO, president and chairman of the board of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and chief of the North County Fire Protection District located in Fallbrook, California. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement today on the hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government."

The International Association of Fire Chiefs is a 501(c)(3) organization, which represents nearly 10,000 leaders in the disciplines of the fire and the emergency medical services (EMS). The IAFC's members are leaders in volunteer, career, and combination fire departments. As leaders of their organizations, they must plan and lead the response efforts to both national-level emergencies, like hurricanes, major wildland fires, and terrorist attacks, and local everyday events, such as highway accidents, hazardous materials spills, emergency medical calls, and structure fires.

While fire and EMS response is considered a local responsibility, it is important to recognize how federal policies affect local fire departments every day. Tax policies developed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and labor policies developed by the U.S. Department of Labor affect how local fire departments treat their volunteer firefighters and what types of incentives a volunteer firefighter receives. Workplace safety policies developed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) influence a fire department's staffing and equipment decisions, and hazardous materials response training. Research findings developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and other federal laboratories help drive the development of new equipment, tactics, and standard operating procedures for emergency response. Policies developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) shape how fire departments respond to wildland fires near their communities. The policies of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) help fund and guide local EMS response. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) develop policies and training that inform hazardous materials response. Regulations and programs at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) direct communications by fire and EMS departments. Finally, the grants and policies of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) aid local fire departments on a variety of levels, including training and education, mutual aid assistance, assistance with terrorism response, and tools to help better manage fire departments.

One of the core missions of the IAFC is to educate its membership and the leaders of America's fire and emergency services. The IAFC holds five annual conferences to deliver both specialized and general education to its members about issues as varied as wildland fire response; EMS practices; hazardous materials response; leadership of volunteer and combination fire departments; and a general conference on fire and EMS leadership. Because it is difficult for a local fire chief to keep up with the continuously changing stream of federal laws, regulations, policies and programs, many of our members attend these conferences to learn about new developments at the federal level and how they will affect their departments' operations.

The IAFC is concerned by proposed legislation and other ideas discussed in Congress that may affect federal attendance at its conferences. Federal speakers play a key role in our conferences. Over the years, we have found that representatives from federal agencies are the best people to educate our members about new federal policies. For example, at our 2013 International Hazardous Materials Response Teams Conference, we had the following federal agencies discussing the following topics:

**Federal Bureau of Investigation:** Response to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism Response  
**NIST:** Collecting Biological Samples  
**PHMSA:** Pipeline Emergency Response and Hazmat Response  
**Customs and Border Patrol:** Hazmat Response on the Border  
**Environmental Protection Agency:** Disposal of Contaminated Water  
**U.S. Capitol Police:** Task Analysis during Hazmat Response  
**U.S. Army:** Mass Casualty Decontamination  
**U.S. Coast Guard:** Successful Leadership in Emergency Response Situations and Coordinating the Federal Response to an Incident  
**National Library of Medicine:** Chemical Mass Casualty Resources

In addition, a NIST researcher educated the attendees at our 2013 conference for volunteer and combination officers, the VCOS Symposium in the Sun, about new research in fire science and how it will transform fireground tactics. Also, a presenter from the USFA updated attendees at our 2013 EMS conference, Fire-Rescue Med, about future challenges for fire service leadership, such as demographics, technology, and federal policy. Representatives from the NIST, the USFA, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the FEMA also taught classes at our main national conference, Fire-Rescue International, on topics such as firefighting tactics, information sharing, analytical resources, grant programs, and firefighter health and safety. For the IAFC's 2013 Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) conference, the USDA and the USFS provided a number of speakers covering topics such as federal, state, and local collaboration in responding to wildland fires, the use of technology, wildland fire aviation, and lessons learned from three major fires in Idaho in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

By exhibiting on the show floor at IAFC conferences, federal agencies also are able to educate local fire and EMS leaders about their policies and programs. Historically, representatives from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the FEMA, the U.S. Northern Command, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, PHMSA, USDA, and other federal agencies have exhibited at IAFC conferences. By participating on the show floor, federal agencies are able to provide training material directly to beneficiaries from local fire departments and meet with stakeholders to provide information. The show floor provides an open exchange where federal government officials can meet directly with those affected by their policies, answer questions, and learn about the needs of their constituents.

While the IAFC's conferences are geared toward local fire and EMS departments, federal employees do benefit from participating in them. To ensure enlightened policies, it is important

<sup>1</sup> The WUI Conference is produced in collaboration with the DOI, the USFS, and the National Association of State Foresters. The DOI contributes \$20,000 for this conference as part of a grant. In addition, the PHMSA contributed \$20,000 to produce the International Hazardous Materials Response Teams Conference.

that federal policymakers are educated about the fields that they are regulating. At an IAFC conference, federal policymakers can learn about new challenges in fire response, such as the problems caused by low-cost housing construction, new technology, public safety broadband and its uses, and future issues that the local fire and emergency services will have to address including the aging of the American public and how it will affect EMS response.

The leaders of America's fire and emergency services have had to meet the challenges of shrinking budgets over the past six years. The IAFC's members understand the importance of reducing government waste and allocating funds effectively. With that perspective, the IAFC would ask that Congress move wisely on proposals to reform federal attendance at conferences.

As the American Society of Association Executives points out in its statement, there is a difference between a federal conference, such as the infamous ones hosted by the IRS and General Services Administration (GSA), and conferences hosted by associations. The IAFC's conferences are designed by local first responders for local first responders and must meet a more rigorous level of scrutiny than the IRS or GSA apparently did. In addition, they are composed of a broad spectrum of stakeholders with interests in the fire and emergency services field unlike the "federal-employee-only" conferences held by GSA and the IRS. These facts provide federal policymakers an assurance that the conference is more accountable and will provide them with a larger group of constituents with which to exchange information and provide educational materials.

The IAFC is specifically concerned with proposals to limit agency attendance to one conference per year. In many cases, a federal agency may want to send different presenters to the various IAFC conferences to focus on specific audiences, such as sending an expert on wildland fire to educate the attendees at the WUI conference and an expert on hazardous materials response to the International Hazardous Materials Response Teams Conference. Also, we would ask that some consideration be made in defining what constitutes a federal agency or department. For example, if an educator from the National Fire Academy presented a class at the WUI conference in March, would all employees of DHS be prevented from attending the other four IAFC conferences for the rest of the calendar year?

The IAFC also recommends that additional conditions on federal conference participation not become too onerous or bureaucratic. If federal policymakers are forced to go through too many bureaucratic hurdles to teach, exhibit, or attend a conference, they are less likely to decide to participate in the conference. This inevitable result will reduce an important opportunity for information exchange between federal policymakers and the stakeholders that they affect.

As taxpayers and local governmental employees that have to survive on limited budgets, the IAFC's membership thanks the committee for its attention to reducing waste and abuse at federal conferences. However, it is important for committee members to remember that a well-educated electorate is a necessity for a successful government. Federal participation in conferences, such as those held by the IAFC, provide an important opportunity for policymakers to educate their constituents, discuss important issues, and learn about the fields that they affect every day. As the committee evaluates legislation on this issue, the IAFC looks forward to the opportunity to discuss this issue with you in greater detail.



16 January 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chair  
Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC

Re: January 14th Committee Hearing on "Examining Conference  
and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

Dear Chairman Carper:

I am writing to share the views of IEEE-USA on the issue of government participation in science and technology-related conferences as background for your January 14th hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government," and ask that this letter be placed in the hearing record.

The response by Congress and the Executive Branch seeking to ensure appropriate use of government funds for conference and travel expenses in light of the GSA Conferences scandal has been broad and prescriptive. When combined with significant pressures to reduce government spending due to the budget sequester, they have resulted in a variety of unintended and unfortunate consequences that are detrimental to the interests of the United States. One of these consequences has been a significant reduction in the participation of government scientists and engineers (S&Es) in professional conferences that have historically served as an effective and efficient means for advancing critical Federal S&T research and related missions.

With over 200,000 engineers, scientists and allied professionals employed in all sectors of the economy as members, IEEE-USA strongly supports active participation by government scientists and engineers in professional conferences. Participation allows federal scientists and engineers to exchange ideas on novel research, remain current in their technical disciplines, and form valuable collaborations. Professional conferences tie together the U.S. science and engineering community, promote the dissemination of research and technical innovation, facilitate peer review of research, provide training opportunities, create venues for recruitment of talent, and help educate graduate students.

Participation in overseas conferences additionally provides valuable insights into the more than two-thirds of the world's research that is not performed in the U.S., including access to foreign researchers whose ability to enter the U.S. may be inhibited by immigration regulations or visa processing constraints. The absence of U.S. participation internationally has already had significant negative repercussions,

including fewer keynote invitations to leaders in U.S. science and engineering. These conferences permit the U.S. scientists and engineers to attain and retain leadership in a globally competitive R&D environment.

Many federal agencies use technical conferences as opportunities to engage with a wide collection of researchers for peer review, program reviews and future program planning. By drawing technical groups together to a single location, federal agencies can more efficiently review a large collection of independent research projects, helping stay abreast of their R&D investment portfolio while realizing significant cost savings over performing multiple site visits to each researcher's laboratory.

Scientific and technical conferences also play a catalytic role in encouraging technology transfer from our national laboratories and research facilities to the private sector. Effective collaborations, partnerships and information-sharing require the type of face-to-face communications that conference settings provide.

Support for the active participation of government scientists and engineers in the broader professional community is also essential if the federal government wishes to competitively recruit and retain top scientific and technical talent in federal positions. Without the opportunity to present and publish their research, engage in peer review and collaboration, and obtain continuing education, highly qualified technical professionals will pursue career opportunities outside the public sector. The importance of professional development through participation in professional conferences was recognized in the Office of Science and Technology Policy memo, Scientific Integrity, dated 17 December 2010, and in numerous department and agency policies implementing that memo.

The Office of Management and Budget took a useful step last year by issuing a Controller's Alert to federal departments and agencies noting that "as each agency reviews its travel and conference-related activities, it is critical for each agency to continue to recognize the important role that mission-related travel and conferences can often play in Government operations. Given the unique travel and conference needs of each agency, there are circumstances in which physical collocation is necessary to complete the mission. These circumstances may include, but are not limited to, collaborations in the scientific community..."

IEEE-USA believes much more can be done to facilitate participation of government scientists and engineers in S&T conferences through a streamlining of the various bureaucratic rules and processes that were put in place post-GSA to manage and oversee conference expenditures. Modest steps such as allowing approval of multiyear waivers for federal participation in established technical conferences or exempting standards-setting and federal advisory committee meetings from conference travel restrictions would help significantly. The most important thing, however, is for Congress and the Administration to recognize and communicate the value of this participation, in order to create a climate that reinforces a strong and continuing engagement between federal S&T mission agencies and the broader S&T community.

In closing, we would note that Federal policies driving disengagement of government scientists and engineers from the S&T community is encouraging organizations like IEEE to proactively consider relocating major technical conferences out of the U.S. We have been frustrated, and our nation is being embarrassed by the number of invited talks by prominent U.S. government researchers that have been cancelled. Some hosts in the EU are discouraged from even inviting US speakers because travel approval processes result in cancellations that come too late to make program changes. In an age of multi-national big-science collaborations like ITER and CERN, our nation's ability to collaborate on science and technology is waning. As a consequence of these and similar self-inflicted wounds, our global competitiveness is being challenged by China and the EU.

For a more detailed description of the issue and its policy implications, please refer to IEEE-USA's position statement on "Participation in Professional Conferences by Government Scientists and Engineers", which is available on-line at: <http://www.ieeeusa.org/policy/positions/profconferences1012.pdf>

We would also refer you to the testimony offered by the Honorable Rush Holt (NJ-12) at a similar hearing held by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on 27 Feb. 2013. As a trained physicist in public service, Congressman Holt offers experience-based insights that underscore the value of government participation in S&T conferences. His testimony is available on-line at: <http://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Holt-Testimony-Final.pdf>

Thank you for your consideration and please call upon us if we can be of any assistance to the Committee on this issue.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Blank, Ph.D.  
2014 President, IEEE-USA

Cc: Members, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs



**Franchising**<sup>®</sup>  
 Building local businesses,  
 one opportunity at a time.

January XX, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
 Chairman

The Honorable Tom Coburn  
 Ranking Minority Member

U.S. Senate Committee on  
 Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

I write to applaud you for holding a hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government." Although the *Conference Accountability Act of 2013* (S. 1347) makes a number of improvements to the transparency and oversight of government travel, it also contains several provisions which could inadvertently reduce the productivity of federal employees, delaying important government functions and harming businesses with government clients. Meritorious government meetings and travel provide substantial benefits to the franchise community, and it is very reassuring to see that the Committee has turned its attention to this important issue.

Although there are isolated incidents in which federal employees have inappropriately abused the government's travel policies, the overwhelming majority of government travel is undertaken to serve the public interest. Our members, many of whom would find it difficult to travel directly to federal offices, depend on face-to-face meetings with regulators and other government employees in order to share information, express concerns and work together to resolve issues. Personal meetings and conferences allow for a level of collaboration simply not possible through phone or email contact.

According to the results of a recent study conducted by Rockport Analytics, leaders in the public and private sectors agree that face-to-face meetings benefit all the parties involved. Nearly three-quarters of private-sector executives responded that their companies benefitted from government employee attendance of conferences and meetings. Furthermore, ninety percent of government supervisors surveyed believed that government meetings and events benefitted citizens. This consensus clearly illustrates the value that these meetings offer both federal agencies and the private enterprises. Arbitrarily limiting government travel would limit the productivity of these agencies and deprive businesses of critical resources and insight.

Reducing government spending is a commendable goal. However, I am concerned that S. 1347's budget reductions would have a far more significant impact on essential government functions than they would on the isolated abuses that occur. The bill significantly reduces all federal travel budgets through Fiscal Year 2018. When adjusted for inflation, the changes necessitated by S. 1347 require an over 20% reduction in total government travel. Such a substantial cut far exceeds the amount lost to abuse every

1501 K Street, N.W., Suite 350 Washington, DC 20005 USA

Phone: +1 202/628-8000 Fax: +1 202/628-0812 [www.franchise.org](http://www.franchise.org)



year and would almost certainly impede legitimate federal travel and all the benefits it provides. Furthermore, the businesses that provide these travel services would see their revenue reduced, slowing growth and potentially costing jobs.

Face-to-face meetings and conferences allow government employees to be more responsive, effective and efficient. While curbing wasteful spending is very important, the across-the-board cuts prescribed by S. 1347 and the House version of the DATA Act represent a sledgehammer solution to a problem better suited for a scalpel. I respectfully urge you to reform these provisions, and consider the value that meetings and travel provide government agencies as they execute their missions and serve the general public.

Sincerely,



6540 Arlington Blvd  
Falls Church, VA 22042-6638  
Tel: 703.536.7080  
Fax: 703.536.7019  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

## Irrigation Association Statement for the Record

### Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

January 14, 2014

Submitted by  
**Deborah M. Hamlin, CAE, FASAE**  
CEO, Irrigation Association  
[deborahhamlin@irrigation.org](mailto:deborahhamlin@irrigation.org)

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn and members of the committee, on behalf of the approximate 1,800 member companies of the Irrigation Association, I thank you for the opportunity to state our position regarding government employee travel to trade shows and conferences. This is a very important issue for both the Irrigation Association and our member companies; we greatly appreciate your attention to this issue.

The Irrigation Association is a 501(c)6 trade association representing all facets of the irrigation industry. With members ranging from Fortune 500 companies to independently-owned small businesses, our members are dedicated to promoting efficient irrigation in agriculture, commercial, residential, golf and sports turf through cutting edge irrigation technologies, products and professional services. The Irrigation Association is primarily focused on promoting efficient irrigation through four strategic areas: education, certification, standards development and advocacy. Since our inception, we pride ourselves on our partnerships with agencies, such as the USDA and the EPA, to not only educate and train government employees (and vice-versa), but also cross promote both association and government programs that drive the adoption of efficient irrigation practices.

Partnerships with federal agencies are paramount to our success. Water is a precious natural resource that should be managed wisely and efficiently. The federal government holds the "keys to the kingdom" in many areas of water management. In other words, public-private partnerships and personal interaction is necessary to meet the water-usage needs of the current and future generations of Americans. Fortunately, we have had the opportunity to facilitate these face-to-face interactions, including training, hearings, education and workshops, with federal agency employees at our annual trade show and other educational conferences. Without this opportunity, I'm convinced that the positive relationship that we currently enjoy with the USDA and EPA, among others, would not be where it is today.

### **Agency Partnerships With the Irrigation Association**

#### United States Department of Agriculture

The Irrigation Association currently has a memorandum of understanding with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to recognize those irrigation professionals who hold a certified irrigation designer or a certified agricultural irrigation specialist certification ([www.irrigation.org/certification](http://www.irrigation.org/certification)) as a technical service provider. These TSPs are not government employees, but rather industry experts who supplement federal employees where specific knowledge on efficient agricultural irrigation may fall short or is not available. TSPs assist farmers and ranchers with their conservation plans and goals when entering into a voluntary contract with the NRCS to implement conservation practices.

In addition to the NRCS, the IA also enjoys a strong partnership with the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Every five years, as part of the Census of Agriculture, NASS produces the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey. This survey is extremely useful for those of us in the irrigation industry. However, it is only successful because of the open dialogue that NASS and the IA enjoy when developing the questions for the survey and promoting the survey to farmers and ranchers.

#### United States Environmental Protection Agency

In 2006, the U.S. EPA's Office of Water created the WaterSense program to promote water-use efficient products and services in the marketplace. After its creation (the IA was one of the supporting organizations), WaterSense made the decision to not only label commercial and residential irrigation-efficient products, but also commercial and residential irrigation professional certifications. To date, the IA has four of our certifications labeled by WaterSense. These certifications are certified irrigation contractor, certified irrigation designer, certified landscape irrigation auditor and certified golf irrigation auditor ([www.irrigation.org/certification](http://www.irrigation.org/certification)). This translates to nearly 2,000 irrigation experts nationwide who can promote themselves as being certified by a WaterSense-labeled certification, thus setting them apart from their competition and driving water-use efficiency through irrigation.

In 2012, WaterSense completed its specification for weather-based irrigation controllers, otherwise known as smart controllers. The irrigation industry can now promote these labeled products in the marketplace, which have to go through third-party testing to ensure performance, similar to the plumbing-labeled toilets, showerheads, faucets and urinals. Smart controllers use real-time weather data to communicate with the irrigation system, thus moving away from a less efficient "clock and calendar" controller. The EPA staff was instrumental in working with industry representatives, including at various Irrigation Shows, in coming to a final agreed-upon testing specification that is now used to label these smart controllers. Again, the face-to-face interaction was paramount to achieve the agreed upon specification.

### **Government Agency Attendance at IA Conferences and Trade Shows**

Held every fall, the Irrigation Association hosts the annual Irrigation Show and Education Conference ([www.irrigationshow.org](http://www.irrigationshow.org)). The only national show dedicated to irrigation-specific technologies, the Irrigation Show brings together approximately 4,000 industry professionals to learn about the latest irrigation technologies, attend educational offerings and learn about the

latest trends in irrigation efficiency and water management. During the 2013 Irrigation Show, held in Austin, Texas, the Irrigation Association offered 17 irrigation seminars and 51 technical sessions. A great majority of these classes were either taught or attended by federal government employees (many from the USDA). This expertise both gained and shared by federal employees helps drive our industry forward. Any further limits placed on their attendance will not only decrease the amount of knowledge gained by these federal employees, it will also hurt the irrigation industry as a whole in our efforts to promote efficient irrigation.

#### **Water Use in the United States**

According to the United States Geological Service, in 2005, more than 128 billion of gallons of water are used for irrigation each day. As more and more people move to arid climates, weather patterns change and the demand for food, clothing and energy increases, so will the demand for water for irrigation. One of the ways to meet our future needs is to get more out of what we currently have available. Efficient irrigation does just that. With the ability to significantly increase yield, while not wasting water, efficient irrigation is credited toward both increasing productivity of farmers and ranchers, while returning stream flow to our nations rivers and streams.

It is imperative that our partnerships, interaction and training with federal government employees not only continues, but increases. Having someone from the EPA get to know an irrigation contractor from Arizona, who is not able to fly to Washington, DC, but is able to attend our 2014 Irrigation Show in Phoenix, is invaluable both to our industry and federal agencies.

#### **Conclusion**

Again, on behalf of the Irrigation Association, thank you for taking the time to discuss this important issue. We urge this committee to embrace the innovation and collaboration between private industry and the federal government that cannot continue unless federal employees are once again allowed to travel and attend conferences relative to the industries in which they work.



**Midstates Development Inc.**  
Professional Property Management

---

412 Pavonia St. • P.O. Box 3275 • Sioux City, IA 51102 • 712/258-3251 • Fax 712/293-0787

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
Hearing: "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"  
January 14, 2014  
Statement of: Lon M. Claeys  
President, Iowa/Nebraska Affordable Housing Management Association

Thank you, Chairman Carper for the opportunity to submit this statement on behalf of the Iowa/Nebraska Affordable Housing Management Association (IA/NE AHMA).

IA/NE AHMA is a non-profit organization with a membership consisting of apartment owners and managers, multifamily housing stakeholders, and vendors who provide goods and services to the affordable housing industry. Our mission includes encouraging and promoting the development and preservation of quality multifamily housing and preparing our affordable housing professionals to succeed in our ever-changing economic and political environments. Currently, IA/NE AHMA holds two conferences a year which are attended by our members, the Contract Administrators, staffing from City Housing Authorities, and agency staff from HUD.

IA/NE AHMA fully supports Congressional efforts to improve accountability and transparency in federal spending. With that said, as the Committee continues to conduct its oversight of conference and travel spending, please continue to consider the vital role our conferences play in promoting regulatory compliance. Conferences, like IA/NE AHMA's two yearly meetings, provide the environment to facilitate face-to-face communication between HUD agency staff and private organizations. We feel this is vitally important in keeping true to our mutual mission of developing and preserving quality affordable multifamily housing and preparing our professionals to succeed in this industry.

Further, the attendance of staff from HUD facilitates the ability to provide regulatory updates and a face-to-face explanation for the correct compliance protocols directly to the apartment owners and management agents who participate in these programs. Additionally, these conferences provide the opportunity for agency staff to solicit and receive feedback from our housing professionals. These exchanges give agency staff a better understanding of the day-to-day impact of policy decisions which has resulted in a pragmatic approach to their guidance for improving our members' compliance protocols.

The Conference Accountability Act of 2013 (S. 1347) limits agency staff participation at private meetings to one conference sponsored or organized by a particular organization per fiscal year. Even though such bills are well-intentioned, the unintended consequences of S. 1347 or similar legislation would harm our members' ability to understand and comply with federal regulations. Legislation that restricts and hinders knowledge-sharing between the government and private organizations is counterproductive and will cause more problems than what it is intended to correct. We believe this is contrary to Congress' goals of reducing burdensome regulations and strengthening the economy. Additionally, agency staff

would be forced to primarily communicate to those they regulate through impersonal electronic means. As a result, without meaningful face-to-face input and feedback from impacted housing professionals, federal government officials will become unapproachable and remote.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing. I also wish to thank the members of the Committee for considering the impact of public policies that will affect federal agency officials' ability to attend private sector membership conferences.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lon M. Claeys". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".

Lon M. Claeys

President, Iowa/Nebraska Affordable Housing Management Association



**MRS** MATERIALS RESEARCH SOCIETY®  
*Advancing materials. Improving the quality of life.*

506 Keystone Drive  
 Warrendale, PA 15086-7537 USA  
 tel 724.779.3000 • fax 724.779.8013  
 info@mrs.org • www.mrs.org

January 8, 2014

Senator Thomas R. Carper  
 513 Hart Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510-0803

Senator Thomas A. Coburn  
 172 Russell Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510-3604

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

On behalf of the Materials Research Society (MRS), we ask you to monitor the implementation and impact OMB federal travel restrictions have on the national research enterprise and our innovation-based economy. It is not in the national interest to have our government-funded scientists bear a disproportionate burden under these guidelines or future legislation.

We agree with the importance of your Committee's mission to responsibly control federal spending. In the implementation of this mission and oversight, it is important to consider the role that attendance at professional society meetings plays in serving the objectives of government-funded research. Federal employee travel opportunities initiate collaborations between scientific researchers at universities, other government laboratories, and in industry, which, in turn, will optimize federal investment already made in innovation, intellectual property, and scientific research. Extreme travel restrictions will have unanticipated consequences on scientific productivity within the U.S. The nature of scientists' work requires them to share research findings with their peers and colleagues at scientific meetings. This interaction is fundamental to scientific advances and serves as the means to ensure best practices, seed ideas for subsequent research, and ultimately yield cutting-edge scientific developments.

Participation in scientific meetings and the associated travel helps to facilitate technology transfer and permit researchers to meet the scientific objectives of their own government-funded research. Many exchanges and collaborations between scientists employed at government laboratories and those in industry and academia are initiated at scientific conferences. For centuries, peer collaboration has been fundamental to scientific advances and is unlikely to occur without personal interaction. In the most damaging case, the unique innovation engine of the U.S. which is powered by people could slow or halt. Taken to extreme, current guidelines will negatively impact scientific discovery, job creation, economic growth, our global competitiveness, and national security.

The Materials Research Society represents over 16,000 professional scientists and engineers who work on fundamental and applied research and development. Members of MRS work at the

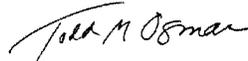
forefront of technology—from basic research to product development—in fields as diverse as advanced electronics and semiconductors, aerospace, biomedical devices, nanotechnology, alternative and sustainable energy, and advanced computation and communication technologies.

Please let us know how we can be of assistance, as you provide direction to this important topic of federal employee travel expenditures and associated guidelines.

Sincerely yours,



Tia Benson Tolle, PhD  
MRS President



Todd M. Osman, PhD  
MRS Executive Director

cc: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid  
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell  
Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee

UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
EXAMINING CONFERENCE AND TRAVEL SPENDING ACROSS THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT  
STATEMENT OF  
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT DEFINED CONTRIBUTION  
ADMINISTRATORS  
JANUARY 14, 2014

The National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators (NAGDCA)\*, wishes to make the Committee and its members aware of the benefits of relevant federal employee participation in the Association's meetings throughout the nation.

NAGDCA's experience is that the attendance at its meetings of key government officials with responsibility for the regulation of various aspects of state and local government employee's defined contribution retirement plans is invaluable for both its members and for the Federal Government and those officials who participate in these meetings.

Intergovernmental coordination and communication between all three levels of government contributes greatly to ensuring compliance of plans with federal regulation and in meeting mutual interests regarding best practices, outreach and education on the importance of saving for retirement.

The administration of defined contribution plans for state and local government employees requires strict adherence to several provisions of the Internal Revenue Code and securities laws. Although government defined contribution plans are not subject to ERISA, NAGDCA members, in many cases, follow its rules affecting the fairness and security of the defined contribution plans they administer.

NAGDCA's conferences, attended by over 800 people, allow for efficiency of information exchange and communication. Having federal government officials at our meetings where they can address broad issues applicable to numerous state and local agencies is much more efficient than having those entities pursue guidance and information on a case-by-case basis.

Therefore, over the years NAGDCA has invited key officials of the Internal Revenue Service, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Department of Labor to speak and participate at its annual meeting and several regional conferences. The participation of these officials has provided important information and perspective for NAGDCA members. NAGDCA believes it has also provides invaluable feedback for those federal officials who are participating at our conferences.

\*NAGDCA was founded in 1980 and is the leading professional public employer-sponsored organization of deferred compensation and defined contribution plan administrators. NAGDCA represents administrators from the 50 states and over 200 local governmental entities, as well as private industry plan providers. NAGDCA is an organization in which its members work together to improve state and local government defined contribution plans including §457(b), §401(k), §401(a), and §403(b) through a sharing of information on investments, marketing, administration and laws relating to such plans. Altogether the public sector defined contribution retirement plan market consists of approximately 12 million state and local government employees and 5.6 million public school district employees and administer approximately three trillion dollars in assets.

It has always been NAGDCA's intention to be modest in its hospitality extended to these officials. NAGDCA's intention is to benefit from the knowledge and developments these officials have to offer and not to influence them in their official duties other than to make them aware of developments for defined contribution plans.

NAGDCA believes that Congress should encourage these dialogues, with appropriate restrictions, as an essential part of the relationship between all levels of government.



400 North Columbus Street  
 Suite 203  
 Alexandria, VA 22314  
 (703) 683-8630  
 (703) 683-8634 FAX  
[www.nahma.org](http://www.nahma.org)

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
 Hearing: "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"  
 January 14, 2014  
 Statement of Kris Cook, CAE  
 Executive Director, National Affordable Housing Management Association**

Thank you, Chairman Carper for allowing me to submit this statement on behalf of the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA).

NAHMA is a 501(c)(6) non-profit trade association which represents apartment owners and managers, multifamily housing industry stakeholders, and providers of goods and services to the affordable housing industry. Our mission includes promoting the development and preservation of quality affordable multifamily housing and preparing affordable housing professionals to succeed in evolving economic and political environments. To achieve these goals, NAHMA holds three membership conferences each year that are attended by our members as well as legislative and executive branch employees.

NAHMA supports congressional efforts to improve accountability and transparency in federal spending. As the Committee conducts its oversight of agencies' conference and travel spending, please continue to consider the essential role private conferences play in advancing regulatory compliance. Private conferences, like NAHMA's three yearly membership meetings, facilitate the communication between federal agency staff and private organizations which is necessary to create constructive, effective, and transparent private-public partnerships.

Federal officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD) and the Department of Treasury-Internal Revenue Service (Treasury-IRS) attend NAHMA's meetings. Here are just a few examples of how federal agency staff participation at NAHMA's membership conferences serves the public interest:

- Agency staff from HUD, USDA-RD and Treasury-IRS provide regulatory updates and explain the correct regulatory compliance protocol for federal affordable multifamily housing programs directly to the apartment owners and management agents who participate in these programs.
- Discussions that occur during NAHMA membership meetings and other private conferences help develop and maintain public-private partnerships to deal with ongoing regulatory issues outside of the meetings. This, in turn, helps create informed policymakers that make decisions geared toward reducing excessive regulatory burdens, increasing economic growth, and creating jobs.
- NAHMA's conferences provide the opportunity for agency staff to solicit and receive feedback from industry stakeholders about improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs and reducing program costs. These exchanges also give agency staff a better understanding of the day-to-day impact of policy decisions.

Exchanges between NAHMA members and agency officials at our private conferences have resulted in improved federal housing policies. For example, in August 2011, HUD released burdensome  
 PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROPERTY MANAGERS AND OWNERS

guidance on bedbug infestations in HUD-assisted and HUD-insured apartment buildings. The guidance was written in a way that was interpreted by some local courts as superseding the landlord/tenant lease agreements. Likewise, the guidance made it more difficult for apartment owners and managers to prevent and treat repeat infestations which resulted directly from tenants' noncompliance with treatment protocols. The NAHMA membership conference provided owners and managers with the opportunity to discuss the real impact of this guidance on their properties' operations. These exchanges gave agency staff a deeper understanding of practitioners' concerns. They also helped HUD write improved, pragmatic, and workable bedbug guidance which was released in April 2012.

For these reasons, NAHMA cannot support legislation such as the Conference Accountability Act of 2013 (S. 1347). This bill would arbitrarily limit agency staff participation at private meetings to one conference sponsored or organized by a particular organization (other than the agency) per fiscal year. Legislation that restricts knowledge-sharing between the government and private organizations is counterproductive to Congress' goals of reducing burdensome regulations, strengthening the economy, and creating jobs. Even when such bills are well-intentioned, the unintended consequences of S. 1347 or similar legislation would harm our members' ability to understand and comply with federal regulations. Additionally, federal government officials would be forced to make decisions in a vacuum without meaningful input from impacted stakeholders.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing. I also wish to thank members of the Committee for considering the positive impact on public policies which resulted from federal agency officials' attendance at private sector membership conferences.



Serving the Vending and Refreshment Services Industry

January 29, 2014

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: **Comments on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"**

The National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) is a section 501(c)(6) membership organization representing more than 1,500 members and companies in the food and refreshment vending, coffee service, and food service management industries. NAMA appreciates the opportunity to submit the following comments regarding the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee's recent hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government." Each year, NAMA, in conjunction with its state associations, hosts a number of business meetings, conferences, conventions, exhibitions, and an annual trade show, all of which are designed to share information, to educate, and to train on best practices and latest industry developments.

Accordingly, as the progress is made on both oversight and review of internal federal conferences, NAMA asks that the Committee specifically note the difference between meetings and conferences hosted by government and those held by associations. Past federal employee presentations presented at NAMA conferences have been helpful to industry leaders by describing new federal regulations and how they apply to the vending industry. Specifically, updates on vending machines regulations pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) pending Calorie Disclosure rules. For federal employees, the opportunity to meet private sector professionals at association meetings and conferences (particularly in the sectors of the economy they regulate and influence) is critical to both them and to the policymaking process for the reasons described below.

Federal agencies benefit from meeting and interacting with experts in their field of oversight at trade or professional association conferences, meetings, and events. Gathering knowledgeable experts and industry participants at association meetings and conferences is a significant resource because it saves the government money in employee training costs on the topics presented due to the amount of first-hand knowledge and technological information shared between industry experts and federal employees in attendance.

The National Automatic Merchandising Association • [www.vending.org](http://www.vending.org)

**Headquarters:** 20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 3500 • Chicago, IL 60606-3102 • Voice: 312/ 346-0370 • Fax: 312/ 704-4140  
**Eastern Office:** 1600 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 650 • Arlington, VA 22209 • Voice: 571/346-1900 • Fax: 703/836-8262  
**Southern Office:** 2300 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 700 • Alpharetta, GA 30009 • Voice: 678/916-3852 • Fax: 678/916-3853  
**Western Office:** 80 South Lake Avenue, Suite 538 • Pasadena, CA 91101 • Voice: 626/229-0900 • Fax: 626/229-0777

Further, the presence of federal employees at such events also fosters better public policy engagement. During these meetings, association members learn best practices in order to work most productively with government, are apprised of the latest developments in policy and regulations, and learn of potential future challenges to their industries. The federal employees also learn about the impacts of policies and regulations to various industries and can provide valuable insight on possible changes or compliance measures. This knowledge base provided at association conferences is also valuable to the federal employee in assisting them to meet their requirements to protect regulatory impact on small business pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act. Thus, these interactions are mutually beneficial for both the private and the public sectors.

Accordingly, NAMA urges caution on legislative proposals, that while well-intentioned, would have unintended consequences of limiting the kinds of meetings and information exchange that is in the best interest of American taxpayers.

We reiterate our request that Congress and the Administration refrain from imposing wholesale restrictions on federal employee attendance at association conferences and educational events. Should you have any questions regarding NAMA or the aforementioned comments, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,



Carla Balakgie  
NAMA President and CEO

cc: Dan Mathews, NAMA VP & COO  
Eric Dell, NAMA SVP, Government Affairs

**National Association of State Credit Union Supervisors (NASCUS)  
National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC)**

**Submission for the Record  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Hearing Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government  
January 29, 2014**

---

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

The undersigned state regulator organizations appreciate the opportunity to provide this written statement for the record of the January 14, 2014, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs hearing examining conference and travel spending across the federal government. We are writing to express our concern regarding the Government Spending Accountability Act of 2013 (H.R. 313) passed by the House and currently under consideration in the Senate; and the Conference Accountability Act of 2013 (S. 1347), which affect government employees' ability to attend meetings and conferences.

We appreciate and support Congressional efforts to ensure diligent oversight and accountability in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars by federal agencies. However, proposals that unduly restrict opportunities for engagement between state and federal regulators could significantly restrict the state-federal coordination that is a key element of financial regulation.

The regular and meaningful interaction of federal financial regulators with their state counterparts is imperative to the successful operation of the financial regulatory system. State regulators must be able to coordinate with the staffs of federal regulatory agencies on a regular basis in order to ensure that supervisory activities are conducted in an integrated, efficient, and comprehensive manner.

Conferences at the state, regional and national level allow regulators to actively engage on critical challenges that face the entities and industries that they regulate. This type of face-to-face collaboration advances the public policy goal of a comprehensive and least burdensome regulatory framework in a way that teleconferences and webcasts alone could not hope to achieve.

In the current financial regulatory environment this state-federal collaboration is more important than ever. Financial institutions and their regulators are still actively navigating Dodd-Frank implementation and other wide-ranging regulatory reforms in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Consumer protection laws, cyber security, interest rate risk, and capital reforms are just a few of the important issues that require coordinated action by state and federal regulators.

Our dual system of financial regulation drives innovation and efficiency in the financial services industry and with financial regulators. A restriction on the free and unfettered dialogue between state and federal regulators could inadvertently undermine the effective administration of our dual system of financial regulation, which is a hallmark of the U.S. financial system.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE CREDIT UNION SUPERVISORS (NASCUS)  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INSURANCE COMMISSIONERS (NAIC)



## NAVY LEAGUE *of the United States*



Chairman Thomas Carper  
Ranking Member Tom Coburn  
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn,

On behalf of the 42,000 members of the Navy League, I am writing to express our concerns regarding travel restrictions that would be imposed on government employees attending conferences. As you consider the issue at the hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending across the Federal Government", the Navy League recommends considering the value of in-person conferences, and how restrictions like these will have a negative impact on the ability of government workers to perform their jobs.

The Navy League of the United States is a 501(c)3 nonprofit working to support sea service members and their families. The Navy League has three missions: to enhance the morale of active duty personnel and their families; to inform Congress and the American public on the importance of strong sea services; and to support youth through programs such as the Naval Sea Cadet Corps. One of the ways the Navy League fulfills this mission is by hosting in-person meetings and education programs with government employees.

Providing platforms focused on professional development and education which allow the dissemination of technical and business information within the naval and maritime community is essential to maintaining naval forces ready to meet current and future requirements. In order to ensure government and industry professionals have the same understanding of the challenges facing our sea services it is important that they share the same knowledge of the services issues, priorities and goals. It is through public forums like the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space exposition that this exchange of information occurs and allows the sea services to address a broad audience to describe developing requirements, priorities and policies.

The benefit of hearing directly from sea service leadership with the goal of creating solutions that are mutually beneficial to industry and the sea services is undeniable. The exchange of information and ideas that are generated at professional development sessions help stimulate new ideas for overcoming ongoing challenges, with solutions often coming from unexpected sources. With attendees coming from diverse industries including shipbuilding, aviation, electronics, shore facilities and ordinance, these professional development sessions offer networking opportunities for all aspects of defense industry..

Due to the interactive element of these professional development sessions it is more beneficial for participants to be physically present. Although teleconferencing can be valuable it limits the ability of participants to interact beyond the orchestrated discussion. Attending in person allows participants the opportunity to meet new colleagues who can possibly provide insights on projects and provide unforeseen opportunities. It also allows for a greater diversity of representation; small businesses are given the opportunity to interact with government employees that they otherwise may not be able to meet.

Throughout the course of the session, many networking opportunities are available for government and industry employees. The exchange of information and ideas at these types of events can lead to solutions that cross industry boundaries.

Professional development is important to maintaining the skill sets needed to stay current in any technical profession, and is especially true in a profession as physically and mentally demanding as our sea services. Professional development conferences and expositions provide an efficient and cost effective venue for accredited education in technical and programmatic fields.

Professional development conferences and expositions can be an effective expenditure of the taxpayer's dollars and, over the long term, are mission critical endeavors for the Sea Services. It is essential that these events are structured so that the topics covered by senior leadership are the ones that are most essential to the mission of the sea services, therefore providing the maximum return on investment for our Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen and Merchant Mariners.

We urge you to consider the value of in-person meetings during this important hearing. If you have any questions, please contact me at 703-528-1775.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce K. Butler". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Bruce K. Butler  
National Executive Director  
Navy League of the United States





January 28, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper, Chairman  
Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Carper,

The National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association (NHCAA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the issue of federal spending for conferences and travel for federal employees. We watched with interest the January 14, 2014, Committee hearing titled, "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government," and this letter offers our association's perspective and experience for your consideration.

NHCAA's mission is to protect and serve the public interest by increasing awareness and improving the detection, investigation, civil and criminal prosecution and prevention of health care fraud and abuse. It is the leading national organization focused exclusively on the problem of health care fraud and was founded in 1985 by private insurers together with public sector law enforcement and regulatory agencies. NHCAA has remained a private-public partnership throughout its 29 years, with members comprising the nation's most prominent health insurance plans as well as those federal, state and local government law enforcement and regulatory agencies having jurisdiction over health care fraud.

Through its educational foundation, NHCAA provides a diversified range of education and training opportunities which includes in-person training programs across the country, as well as audio conferences, webinars, online distance learning and on demand education. Our Annual Training Conference (ATC), held each November, is the nation's premier health care anti-fraud meeting where more than 1,100 anti-fraud professionals from both the private and public sectors receive training on health care fraud trends and emerging schemes along with the detection and investigative skills and techniques needed to successfully address them.

Law enforcement agencies are an integral part of NHCAA training. Federal agencies actively participate on our education planning committees to help identify the issues and topics of importance to them. We then use their input to build relevant training programs to address those topics. Government representatives also are regularly invited to present as faculty at our programs, providing opportunities to share fraud cases, new initiatives, challenges and successes. As attendees at our educational programs, federal agency employees gather vital information that assists them in fraud prevention and detection and in identifying potential new civil and criminal cases. In addition, agencies have often taken advantage of the added benefit of having their employees together at one location to host their own closed door meetings in conjunction with our programs.

For all participants, our programs emphasize the value of hearing directly from the experts in the health care anti-fraud field; the opportunity to build trust and form significant working relationships between the

---

private and public sectors; the chance to share information and identify trends and schemes; and the ability to develop, learn and share fraud-fighting best practices.

NHCAA has significantly felt the effects of the recent restrictions and reductions in funding for federal travel and training. For example, in 2011, 1,322 individuals attended our Annual Training Conference, where we hosted 70 workshops and breakout sessions. More than 320 of those attendees were federal agency employees, most coming from the FBI and HHS-OIG. In contrast, this past November, only 95 federal agency employees attended the conference out of a total of 1,165 attendees. However, much more importantly than any financial impact on NHCAA, the much smaller government presence served as a net loss for the nation's collective health care anti-fraud efforts.

Senator, with your long history as a strong proponent of combating fraud in health care, you know that the sharing of anti-fraud information and the exchange of best practices between commercial health insurers and the government health care programs is crucial to our ability to successfully meet this challenge. Perpetrators of health care fraud are extremely opportunistic and do not discriminate between types of medical coverage. The same schemes used to defraud Medicare migrate over to private insurers, and schemes perpetrated against private insurers make their way into government programs. As such, the sharing of anti-fraud information is critical.

Our educational programs provide the venue for this sort of information-sharing. But, without federal agencies at the table, an enormous piece of the fraud puzzle is missing. NHCAA is concerned that severely limiting federal employees' ability to interact and meet with their private sector peers will return us to a more siloed world of fraud fighting that undermines anti-fraud efforts and gives fraudsters the upper hand.

One concept that was discussed repeatedly during the January 14<sup>th</sup> hearing was the need for federal agencies to conduct regular cost benefit analyses on travel and training expenditures. We agree. NHCAA is confident that our programs enable federal employees to gain knowledge that assists them in directly meeting their organizations' missions. Information gleaned at one of our educational programs about an emerging health care fraud scheme, for example, can save an agency millions of dollars and alert them to the dangerous practices of providers who are putting patients at risk.

We appreciated very much your comments during the hearing regarding your time as Delaware State Treasurer and later as Governor, and how valuable the time spent in-person with your peers truly was. While NHCAA continues to embrace multiple educational formats, many of which do not require individuals to travel, the value of in-person interactions simply cannot be replicated. And as you noted, it is often the informal conversations that take place in-person which yield the most benefit.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer NHCAA's perspective. We would be happy to discuss this further or answer any questions that you or your Committee colleagues may have.

Sincerely,



Louis Saccoccio  
Chief Executive Officer

National Laboratory Directors Council  
Executive Committee

www.nationallabs.org • nldc-chair@nationallabs.org

Paul Alivisatos, Chair  
Dan Arvizu  
Charlie McMillan  
Terry Michalske

January 16, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Chairman, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
United States Senate  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Carper:

Thank you for your request for information on the impact of conference participation policies established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in May of 2012. As members of the Executive Committee of the National Laboratory Directors Council, we appreciate the opportunity to highlight the importance of conference participation to researchers at the national laboratories, and to share concerns about the negative consequences of these policies on the national laboratories as well as on America's scientific enterprise and innovation ecosystem.

Attached is a white paper that details how national laboratory scientists and engineers benefit from participating in scientific conferences – participation that benefits the nation by ensuring American researchers stay on the cutting edge of science. Limiting this interaction between national laboratory scientists and engineers and the broader scientific community has direct and negative impacts on the nation. The restrictive conference policies:

- Preclude many national laboratory researchers from learning about, benefitting from, or supporting the best, most cutting edge science being conducted across the U.S. and throughout the world;
- Negatively impact research relevant to key federal missions, such as: defense and national security; medicine, public health and disease control; homeland security; the development of renewable and other advanced energy technologies; the use of nanotechnology to create new materials; and food safety; and,
- Make it more difficult to recruit and retain the best and brightest, or train the next generation of, scientists and engineers to address issues of national importance.

Additionally, these policies have resulted in the creation of costly new bureaucracies for overseeing conference participation. According to a cursory analysis conducted by the national laboratories' Chief Financial Officers, compliance with OMB policies alone are estimated to have increased administrative costs at the 17 DOE national laboratories six-fold in 2012, from approximately \$2 million to over \$12 million, just to oversee conference participation. This estimate does not include any additional cost that the DOE

The National Laboratory Directors Council Executive Committee is elected by the members of the Council, including the Lab Directors from Ames, Argonne, Berkeley, Brookhaven, Fermi, Idaho, Jefferson, Livermore, Los Alamos, National Energy Technology, National Renewable Energy, Oak Ridge, Pacific Northwest, Princeton, Sandia, Stanford, and Savannah River National Laboratories.

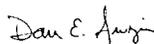
likely incurred. As a result, policies restricting conference participation could very well cost the federal government more than the unnecessary travel they were intended to prevent.

We strive daily to ensure that the national laboratories are acting as responsible stewards of taxpayer funding, and this involves ensuring that conference attendance is consistent with mission needs and expenditures are reasonable, prudent, and justifiable. At the same time, we believe that there is no acceptable substitute for the milieu of intellectual discourse, learning, and networking that is found at a high-quality scientific or technical conference. We urge you to consider these factors as you evaluate policies and legislation – existing and proposed – governing conference participation by national laboratory and other scientists and engineers funded by the federal government.

Sincerely,



A. Paul Alivisatos  
Director, LBNL



Dan Arvizu  
Director, NREL



Charlie McMillan  
Director, LANL



Terry Michalske  
Director, SRNL

Enclosure

CC: The Honorable Ernest Moniz, U.S. Secretary of Energy  
Directors of the National Laboratories

### Conference Participation by National Laboratory Researchers

Scientific and technical conferences and meetings have long been an essential element of the scientific enterprise. As such, the National Laboratories hold to the following *guiding principles*:

1. Scientific communication, in all of its forms, is essential to the achievement of the DoE mission.
2. National Laboratory researchers must be provided with access to communication on equal footing with their peers in academia otherwise the lab system will sacrifice scientific quality and lose key personnel.
3. The laboratories must act as responsible stewards of taxpayer funds, insuring conference attendance is consistent with mission needs and expenditures are reasonable, prudent, and justifiable.

Notably, conferences serve as a venue for:

- ✓ Reporting and vetting of the latest scientific results by subject matter experts and for technical dialogue;
- ✓ Cross-fertilization of ideas among researchers and research fields and between forefront research and potential applications;
- ✓ Fostering the collective identity of research fields;
- ✓ Establishing and fostering collaborations
- ✓ Developing and nurturing professional networks;
- ✓ Accelerating entry into a new field of research;
- ✓ Professional development (including for students and post-doctoral fellows contributing to DOE mission-related research, who will become our future scientific and engineering leaders);
- ✓ Bringing together researchers representing government, industry, and academia from around the world.

While advances in information technology have enabled the accomplishment of some parts of these functions outside of conferences, there continues to be no acceptable substitute for the milieu of intellectual discourse, learning, and networking that is found in a high quality conference. Department support for conferences should be prioritized towards participation in scientific and technical dialog in the most cost effective way possible.

The DOE national laboratories are key players (among many) in the U.S. research enterprise, as stated by Goal 2 of the DOE 2011 Strategic Plan: "Maintain a vibrant U.S. effort in science and engineering as a cornerstone of our economic prosperity with clear leadership in strategic areas," and reinforced by the message from Secretary Chu accompanying the Plan: "The Department's missions and programs are designed to bring the best scientific minds and capabilities to bear on important problems. It is an integrator, bringing together diverse scientists and engineers from national laboratories, academia, and the private sector in multidisciplinary teams, striving to find solutions to the most complex and pressing challenges." In order to meet DOE's strategic goal, as well as to fulfill the Department's other missions in energy and national security, it is imperative that scientists and engineers in the DOE national laboratories continue to have the ability to participate in the conferences and meetings that are central to their expertise and assignment. In addition to the general benefits of appropriate conference participation, benefits accruing to the U.S., DOE, laboratories, and individual researchers include:

"The Office of Science is the single largest supporter of basic research in the physical sciences in the United States."  
*Science.energy.gov*

- The ability of the laboratories to continue to be seen as co-equal participants with academia and industry in the conduct of world-class research and in their presence and active participation in professional organizations;
- The ability of laboratory staff to participate fully as members of the global scientific enterprise;
- Professional development, especially for young researchers as they hone their skills in presenting and defending their work, as well as accelerating their assimilation into an appropriate research network;
- Attraction and retention of top staff through their ability to regularly and appropriately participate in meetings;
- Identification and recruiting of top talent for the laboratories through conference interactions;
- The ability to ascertain the state of a field of potential national security importance;
- Provision of a cost-effective venue for ancillary meetings related to specific programs, collaborations, or focused research areas.

The DOE national laboratories have a long and proud history of full and active participation in the scientific enterprise. The continued ability of laboratory researchers to engage across the full suite of professional activities, including appropriate, cost-effective participation in scientific and technical conferences and meetings is essential to the continued capability of the laboratories to contribute to meeting the strategic goals of the DOE.



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

May 11, 2012

M-12-12

MEMORANDUM TO THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: JEFFREY D. ZIENTS  
ACTING DIRECTOR 

SUBJECT: Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations

The Federal Government has a responsibility to act as a careful steward of taxpayer dollars, ensuring that Federal funds are used for purposes that are appropriate, cost effective, and important to the core mission of executive departments and agencies (agencies). From the beginning of this Administration, the President has been clear that wasteful spending is unacceptable, and that the Federal Government must strive to be more efficient and effective. That is why the President and the Vice President launched the Campaign to Cut Waste and charged agencies with going line-by-line through their budgets to identify areas of unnecessary spending or opportunities for greater efficiency or cost savings.

As part of this effort, on November 9, 2011, the President signed Executive Order 13589 "Promoting Efficient Spending." In that Executive Order, the President directed each agency to reduce its combined costs in a variety of administrative categories by not less than 20 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 from FY 2010 levels. Agencies have since developed plans for achieving these cuts, and the President's FY 2013 Budget identifies \$8 billion in reduced costs as a result of Executive Order 13589.

To achieve these savings, many agencies have identified and implemented creative and innovative practices to reduce costs and improve efficiencies in such areas as travel, conference expenditures, real estate, and fleet management. There are also other practical steps agencies can take to improve operations, increase efficiency, and cut unnecessary spending. Accordingly, this memorandum describes a series of policies and practices related to activities and expenses in these areas, building on measures already in place at various agencies.

**Section 1 – Travel**

Travel is often necessary for Federal employees to discharge their duties effectively and the travel industry plays an important role in creating jobs and supporting local economics; however, as good stewards of Federal funds, agencies must do all they can to manage their travel budgets efficiently. Accordingly, in FY 2013, each agency shall spend at least 30 percent less on travel

expenses covered by this memorandum than in FY 2010.<sup>1</sup> Agencies must maintain this reduced level of spending each year through FY 2016. For the purposes of this section only, the term “agency” means any agency described in 31 U.S.C. 901(b).

In consultation with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), agencies shall direct all immediate savings achieved through this reduction towards investments that improve the transparency of and accountability for Federal spending and therefore serve taxpayers by further reducing wasteful spending over the long-term. Investments should include activities necessary to provide more robust tracking and public reporting of Federal spending, as well as internal audits and investigations to root out fraud and error in Federal programs and activities.

No later than 90 days from the date of this memorandum, agencies shall report to OMB on the proposed reduction in travel expenses as a result of this requirement. Information provided to OMB should include the amount of the proposed reduction in travel expenses, the amount of FY 2010 travel expenses obligations subject to this section that provides a baseline for measuring the required reductions, and the amount of FY 2010 obligations for travel expenses that are excluded from this baseline. The agency may exclude certain travel expenses from reduction only if the agency head determines that inclusion of such expenses as part of the 30 percent reduction target would undermine such critical government functions as national security, international diplomacy, health and safety inspections, law enforcement, or site visits required for oversight or investigatory purposes.<sup>2</sup> Excluded travel expenses will not be part of the baseline that agencies use in calculating the 30 percent reduction target or subject to reduction themselves. In determining how to reduce travel expenses, agencies should consult and collaborate with their Inspectors General (IG) on the appropriate ways to reduce travel for oversight and investigatory purposes, while maintaining the independence and capacity of IGs.

In addition, agencies shall include in their FY 2014 budget submission to OMB a description of how they will make these travel reductions sustainable, including the specific process changes and technology investments necessary to reduce their reliance on travel.

In addition, to assist agencies in achieving these reductions in travel expenses, no later than 180 days from the date of this memorandum, the Department of Defense and the General Services Administration (GSA), in consultation with OMB, shall review the Joint Federal Travel Regulations and the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) to ensure that the policies reduce travel costs without impairing the effective accomplishment of agency missions. This review shall, at a minimum, establish or clarify policies that:

- (a) increase Federal employee sharing of rental automobiles and taxis when appropriate;

<sup>1</sup> “Travel expenses” are defined as obligations categorized under budget object class 21.0 (travel and transportation of persons), which is described in OMB Circular A-11 (section 83.6). In some cases, travel expenses may also include travel funded outside of this object class. OMB will provide additional guidance to affected agencies on areas outside of this object class that should be included in the reductions required by this memorandum.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Attorney General may determine that some portion of the travel by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents is necessary to investigate specific criminal activity and should be excluded from the baseline of travel expenses from which the 30 percent reduction would be taken. Similarly, the Secretary of Health and Human Services may determine that a portion of the travel by Food and Drug Administration inspectors is necessary to ensure the health of the public and should be excluded from the baseline subject to the 30 percent reduction.

- (b) ensure that Federal employees receive a per diem reimbursement only to the extent costs were incurred and not reimbursed by another party;
- (c) promote the identification and use of non-contract air carriers that, if used, will result in a lower total trip cost to the Government;
- (d) expand and leverage the Government's purchasing power to reduce travel costs associated with hotels and rental cars;
- (e) ensure that, whenever practicable, Federal employees arrange airfare in a manner that results in the lowest price available when traveling on domestic flights, including appropriately timing the purchase of airfare; and
- (f) ensure that agencies have controls in place to collect refunds for unused or partially used airline tickets for Federal employees who have purchased airfare, consistent with existing requirements in the FTR and Federal Management Regulation (FMR).<sup>3</sup>

## Section 2 – Conferences

As part of the effort to safeguard Federal funds, agencies should focus on expenses related to conference sponsorship, conference hosting, or attendance of Federal employees at conferences sponsored or hosted by non-Federal entities.<sup>4</sup> Federal agencies and employees must exercise discretion and judgment in ensuring that conference expenses<sup>5</sup> are appropriate, necessary, and managed in a manner that minimizes expense to taxpayers.

On September 21, 2011, OMB issued Memorandum 11-35, "Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government." That memorandum instructed all agencies "to conduct a thorough review of the policies and controls associated with conference-related activities and expenses." In accordance with that memorandum, Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) thoroughly reviewed the policies and controls associated with conference-related activities and expenses to mitigate the risk of inappropriate spending.

To expand upon these efforts, this memorandum outlines a series of new policies and practices for conference sponsorship, hosting, and attendance to ensure that Federal funds are used

<sup>3</sup> See FTR 301-72.100, 301-72.101, 301-72.300; also see FMR 102-118.

<sup>4</sup> "Conference" is defined in this memorandum as it is in the FTR, as "[a] meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel. The term 'conference' also applies to training activities that are considered to be conferences under 5 CFR 410.404." See 41 CFR 300-3.1.

<sup>5</sup> "Conference expenses" are defined as all direct and indirect conference costs paid by the Government, whether paid directly by agencies or reimbursed by agencies to travelers or others associated with the conference, but do not include funds paid under Federal grants to grantees. Conference expenses include any associated authorized travel and per diem expenses, hire of rooms for official business, audiovisual use, light refreshments, registration fees, ground transportation, and other expenses as defined by the FTR. All outlays for conference preparation and planning should be included, but the Federal employee time for conference preparation should not be included. The FTR provides some examples of direct and indirect conference costs included within conference expenses. See 41 CFR 301-74.2. Conference expenses should be net of any fees or revenue received by the agency through the conference and should not include costs to ensure the safety of attending governmental officials.

appropriately on these activities, and that agencies continue to reduce spending on conferences where practicable:

- **Initiate senior level review of all planned conferences** – Expanding upon the requirements of OMB Memorandum 11-35, agency Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) shall initiate review of planned spending for every upcoming conference that is to be sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities) where net conference expenses by the agency will exceed \$100,000. Agencies must ensure that the conference expenses and activities comply with the FTR directives and executive branch policies on conferences as well as the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requirements on contracting goods and services. Until these reviews are completed, agencies shall suspend incurring obligations for conferences to which the agency has not yet committed.
- **Initiate senior level approval of all future conference expenses in excess of \$100,000** – Following the review of planned conferences, Deputy Secretaries (or their equivalents) shall continue to approve the spending for all proposed new conferences to be sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities) where the net conference expenses by the agency will be in excess of \$100,000. Agencies must ensure that no Federal funds are used for unnecessary or inappropriate purposes and that all conference expenses and activities comply with both the FTR and the FAR requirements on lodging, food and beverages, per diem reimbursement, and contracting of goods and services. In addition, agencies should ensure that conference attendance and expenses are limited to only the levels required to carry out the mission of the conference.
- **Prohibit expenses in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference** – An agency shall not incur net expenses greater than \$500,000 from its own funds on a single conference, including conferences that are sponsored or hosted by the agency (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities). The agency head may provide a waiver from this policy if he or she determines that exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose. The grounds for any such waiver must be documented in writing by the agency head.
- **Report publicly on all conference expenses in excess of \$100,000** – Agencies shall report on conference expenses on a dedicated place on their official website. By January 31 of each year (beginning on January 31, 2013), the agency head shall provide a description of all agency-sponsored conferences from the previous fiscal year where the net expenses for the agency associated with the conference were in excess of \$100,000. This description shall include:
  - the total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference;
  - the location of the conference;
  - the date of the conference;
  - a brief explanation how the conference advanced the mission of the agency; and
  - the total number of individuals whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency.

In addition, for any instances where the net expenses for an agency-sponsored conference exceeded \$500,000, the website shall include the agency head's waiver that identified the exceptional circumstances that necessitated exceeding this threshold. Finally, the website shall include information about the net conference expenses for the fiscal year incurred by that agency as well as a general report about conference activities throughout the year.

In reporting these data, agencies shall exclude any information that is considered to be sensitive, is prohibited from public disclosure by statute or regulation, or may jeopardize national security or the health, safety or security of conference attendees, organizers, or other individuals.

### **Section 3 – Real Property**

Agencies must also move aggressively to dispose of excess properties held by the Federal Government and make more efficient use of the Government's real estate assets. Agencies are already streamlining operations and using existing properties to meet the directive in the June 10, 2010 Presidential Memorandum (Disposing of Unneeded Federal Real Estate—Increasing Sales Proceeds, Cutting Operating Costs, and Improving Energy Efficiency) to produce no less than \$3 billion in civilian real property cost savings by the end of FY 2012.

As of the date of this memorandum, agencies shall not increase the size of their civilian real estate inventory, subject to exceptions as described below. Acquisition of new Federal building space (where approval of such acquisition occurs following the date of this memorandum) that increases an agency's total square footage of civilian property must be offset through consolidation, co-location, or disposal of space from the inventory of that agency. In identifying consolidations, co-locations, or disposals of property to offset acquisition of new Federal building space, an agency may include civilian buildings from its own inventory that were, in accordance with the June 10, 2010 Presidential Memorandum, reported as excess to the GSA or otherwise disposed of.

Additional guidance will be provided for carrying out this section, including defining those properties to which this section applies and when a property may be identified as an offset, as well as establishing a process to identify exceptions to this section's requirements where appropriate, such as to comply with legal requirements, to reduce costs, to protect national security, or to allow for the effective accomplishment of agency missions.

### **Section 4 – Fleet Management**

In furtherance of the May 24, 2011 Presidential Memorandum (Federal Fleet Performance), and to optimize the management of Government-owned vehicles, agencies shall use existing GSA fleet services, or initiate a replacement and renewal schedule that is consistent with the requirements of the FMR<sup>6</sup>, whereby standard sedans operate on a replacement schedule of at least three years or until the vehicle has been driven in excess of 60,000 miles (whichever comes first), unless material defects prevent the vehicle from operating in a safe manner or if replacement would save the agency money over the life of the vehicle. GSA shall periodically review such policies for opportunities to further improve efficiency.

<sup>6</sup> See FMR 102-34.270.

Within 90 days of the date of issuance of this memorandum, OMB, in consultation with GSA, will provide agencies with additional guidance on carrying out the provisions in Sections 3 and 4 of this memorandum.

Questions regarding the policies and practices outlined in this memorandum should be directed to the Office of Federal Financial Management at OMB (202-395-3993).



6300 N. River Road, Suite 602 • Rosemont, IL 60018  
Phone (847) 823-5770 • Fax (847) 823-5772

---

Senate Homeland Security & Government Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington DC, 20515

Re: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

The Orthopaedic Research Society is comprised of approximately 2,900 members worldwide. Our members are biologists, engineers, veterinarians, clinicians and orthopaedic surgeons. The collaborations of our members have improved the quality of life for countless patients with musculoskeletal disorders.

The ORS Annual Meeting, attended by over 3,000 people, brings together the best researchers and surgeons in the world and gives them a forum to share new research findings, discuss new ideas and to collaborate. We are dedicated to teaching, mentoring and encouraging our attendees while inspiring them to move the field of orthopaedic research forward. This forum is an extremely valuable resource to government employees. The Annual Meeting exposes government employees to information they would not receive anywhere else. In addition, it provides a unique opportunity for face-to-face interaction with experts in the field of musculoskeletal research.

In the past, government employees have been active participants in the ORS Annual Meeting. We look forward to their continued involvement in the future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda A. Frederick".

Brenda A. Frederick  
Executive Director, Orthopaedic Research Society (ORS)



January 27, 2014

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper, Chair  
 The Honorable Thomas A. Coburn, Ranking Member  
 Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510-6250

**OFFICERS**

The Hon. John Edward Porter, Chair  
 The Hon. Michael N. Castle, Vice Chair  
 Mary Woolley, President  
 Larry J. Shapiro, MD, Secretary  
 Lucinda Maine, PhD, RPH, Treasurer

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Tenley E. Albright, MD  
 Georges C. Benjamin, MD  
 Nancy Brown  
 Susan Dentzer  
 Victor J. Dzau, MD  
 Joseph M. Fecko, MD  
 Jay A. Gershen, DDS, PhD  
 William N. Hait, MD, PhD  
 Mary J.C. Hendrix, PhD  
 Martha N. Hill, PhD, RN  
 Harry Johns  
 Jackie Lovelace Johnson  
 Evan Jones  
 Elizabeth Baker Kaffer  
 The Hon. Patrick J. Kennedy  
 Debra R. Lappin, JD  
 Alan I. Leshner, PhD  
 James L. Madara, MD  
 Mark McClellan, MD, PhD  
 The Hon. Kwesi Mfume  
 Elizabeth G. Nabel, MD  
 Herbert Parides, MD  
 Sudip S. Parikh, PhD  
 Amy Comstock Rick, JD  
 John R. Seffrin, PhD  
 Laing Rogers Sisto  
 Jack T. Watters, MD  
 Keith R. Yamamoto, PhD  
 Elias A. Zerhouni, MD

Statement for Record: Hearing on "Examining Conferences and Travel  
 Spending Across the Federal Government"

Dear Senators Carper and Coburn:

On behalf of Research!America, the nation's largest public education and advocacy alliance committed to advancing U.S. medical innovation, I would like to address the highly negative impact on scientific and technological progress of what is effectively a "one-size-fits-all" set of travel and conference restrictions imposed upon federal agencies.

Research!America appreciates and supports the efforts of the Administration and Congress to enhance transparency and accountability in the use of taxpayer dollars. Further, we understand that blatant abuse of such dollars called for action on the part of the Administration to prevent extravagant and/or needless spending on federal travel and conference expenses.

However, the current OMB rules create barriers to highly productive and beneficial personal interaction in the scientific and technology arenas, at grave expense to medical progress and other areas of scientific and technological advancement. Even the exceptions process, which should help address the flaws in the rules themselves, is so arbitrary and onerous that it fails to exempt legitimate travel from the blanket OMB constraints.

Conferences create a unique opportunity for scientific investigators across sectors and disciplines to convene in a single location. Such events result in the rapid dissemination of cutting-edge information, foster personal relationships necessary for scientific collaboration, and connect federal employees to innumerable public and private research groups – increasing the return on federally funded science by closing communication and knowledge gaps between government and non-government research enterprises. Dissolution of scientific conferences actually increases costs by requiring repeated travel between multiple research groups and institutions to maintain a similar exchange of information, while unjustifiable restrictions on participation by federal scientists and technology experts in these conferences breeds tragic missed opportunities for collaborative problem

1101 King Street  
 Suite 520  
 Alexandria, VA 22314-2960  
 P 703.739.2577  
 F 703.739.2372  
 E info@researchamerica.org  
 www.researchamerica.org

solving, brainstorming and knowledge exchange, each of which has proven to accelerate medical and other scientific and technological progress.

And travel to scientific conferences offers an incomparable educational opportunity for new investigators. Our nation's position as a leader in global scientific advancement and innovation will increasingly depend on the abilities of students and young investigators. Early-career scientists learn the skills of scientific presentation and how to establish and nurture collaborations by participating at conferences, and senior researchers and government agencies are able to mentor and recruit the investigators of the future. Policies that hinder this process will negatively impact the training of young scientists and may reduce innovation in the United States for years to come.

Communication of scientific ideas and theories that occurs during conferences inevitably highlights best practices, mistakes, and results in time- and money-saving adjustments to ongoing investigations. Symposia at conferences allow presenters to receive feedback from researchers across career stages and disciplines. Poster presentations foster face-to-face interactions where the impact, or lack thereof, of individual experiments is debated and critiqued. Exposure to a variety of topics and data in a short timeframe can nurture creative thinking and potentially result in "A-ha!" moments that often spur the latest innovations. Using knowledge acquired at a single conference, researchers refine experimental techniques and goals to better and more quickly answer scientific questions.

Research!America appreciates the Committee's demonstrated commitment – exemplified by the work of the Chairman and Ranking Member – to determining the best means of ensuring proper use of federal travel and conference dollars. As you continue your work to ensure that such funding is not open-ended, we ask that you also ensure that this spending is no longer curtailed in a manner that thwarts invaluable scientific and technological progress. By blocking researchers from contributing to, and gaining insights and partnerships from, scientific conferences, the current travel and conference rules compromise the value of taxpayer-funded research at the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Defense and other agencies that advance crucial national objectives through science and technology. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this statement and look forward to assisting in your efforts to arrive at pragmatic and targeted solutions that prevent misspending without reducing the return on federally funded science and technology.

Sincerely,



Mary Woolley  
President and CEO



SAMPE®

Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering

January 21, 2014

Ms. Laura Kilbride  
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
446 Hart  
Washington, DC 20510-0001

The Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineers' (SAMPE) mission is to be the educational clearing house for those working in advanced materials (such as composites, nanomaterials, biomaterials, etc.). Vetted, reliable scientific data is required as this nation advances our manufacturing goals to fulfill the President's manufacturing initiatives.

SAMPE is somewhat of a unique technical society in that we have members who serve on all levels of the manufacturing continuum – from the research labs to the shop floor. The commonality they share is their work in advanced materials.

Industry is the primary funding source for applied research; however, the Federal Government's funding contribution is of critical importance. To optimize the value of the federal dollars to both government and industry, researchers need to be able to attend technical conferences and seminars where these projects are being discussed. And, at events such as SAMPE technical conferences, not only are the researchers present but also the end users who will be the beneficiaries of these projects.

The impact of the federal travel restrictions on SAMPE has been dramatic throughout 2013. Attendance at our technical meetings dropped both in presenters and registrants due to the inability to attend by those who worked directly for the Federal Government or by those whose projects were funded by the government.

If we are to meet the President's manufacturing goals, we need to have all parties at the table. This is not a partisan statement. Making America the predominant manufacturing workhorse is a goal every citizen can support.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Gregg B. Balko'.

Gregg B. Balko, FASAE, CAE  
CEO  
Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering  
Covina, CA

# Sample of Conferences Over \$500,000 OMB Limit

## DOJ

International Drug Enforcement Conference (MOSCOW) – \$796,285

## Education

FSA Conference (LAS VEGAS) – \$990,000

2013 NCES Summer National Forum on Education Statistics – \$626,000

21st Century Community Learning Centers Summer Institute (NEW ORLEANS) – \$947,064

## VA

National-Veterans Small Business Conference

Small Business (DETROIT) – \$1.6 million

January 29, 2014



Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
 Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government."

The Security Industry Association (SIA) represents more than 470 suppliers of electronic physical security products and services. Many SIA members provide security solutions relied upon by government end-users. Due to the complexity of federal security needs and quickly evolving technology, we believe that blanket restrictions on attendance by federal employees at association conferences deprive government employees from receiving technical educational training that could save lives.

We offer two examples of how travel and participation in conferences by federal employees benefits taxpayers:

- 1) The Security Equipment Integration Working Group (SEIWG) is a standing subcommittee of the Department of Defense Physical Security Equipment Action Group that ensures future Department of Defense (DOD) security systems integrate with existing systems. SEIWG asked SIA to provide it a forum at the 2012 International Security Conference and Exposition (ISC), the largest security event in the United States with over 900 exhibitors and 23,000 attendees. At the ISC event, SEIWG informed industry of a new software-based tool that will allow developers and vendors to verify if their force protection devices communicate in a manner compliant with the SEIWG ICD-0101 family of standards. This will allow DOD to verify their industry partners' products while at the conference, streamlining the process for both DOD and its vendors.
- 2) SIA has worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security's Interagency Security Committee (DHS/ISC) to develop the *Physical Security Criteria for Federal Facilities* and the *Design-Basis Threat Report*, which are the most comprehensive federal facility security standards created to date. The Committee's executive director, Austin Smith utilized meetings at SIA's 2010 and 2011 ISC conferences to bring industry up-to-speed on the new physical security measures, allowing manufacturers to prepare for and more effectively respond to government requests.

We believe this type of information exchange between government and industry is critical to streamlined purchase and deployment of security products and services. We ask in your evaluation of the issue of travel restrictions that you consider the necessity of maintaining valuable information exchange between the federal government and associations like SIA, and the benefits to the public that result.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jake Parker", written over a horizontal line.

Jake Parker  
 Director of Government Relations  
 Security Industry Association



of ideas lead to developments of new findings ranging from issues of health care and disease prevention to streamlining operations to enhance effectiveness of large companies.

For example, during the January 14 hearing on “Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government,” the issue of the value of being present in a room versus engaging with others via phone or teleconference was raised. I-O psychologists have conducted research to examine the effectiveness of virtual teams compared with face-to-face teams. While this is not applicable to large annual meetings because it is focused on multiple, ongoing interactions between a group of individuals, it may help inform future broader policies. Research shows that careful consideration must be given to the way a virtual team is constructed, preparation for meetings, and when and how teams meet. Research findings by I-O psychologists demonstrate that virtual options may not always be the cost-effective alternative one hopes for. There are challenges in virtual meetings that limit both the feeling and the reality of connectedness between group members, as compared with a face-to-face group. Additional research shows how the flexibility of virtual meetings are also a drawback: technical difficulty and psychological resentment both may arise when scheduling calls or meetings across time zones that force some people to meet well outside of the traditional work day. It is also more challenging to lead teams and define roles and responsibilities virtually and there are fewer clues that alert a team leader to disengaged behavior by team members.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions; SIOP and I-O psychologists are happy to serve as an ongoing resource to you in your work on this and other critical issues affecting the federal workforce.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tammy D. Allen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Tammy D. Allen, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology  
President, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology



SPIE.org  
 SPIE@SPIE.org  
 Mail: PO Box 10  
 Bellingham, WA  
 98227-0010  
 Ship: 1000 20th Street  
 Bellingham, WA  
 98225-6705 USA  
 Tel: +1 360 676 3299  
 Fax: +1 360 647 1488

**TO:** Senators Carper and Coburn  
**FROM:** Dr. Eugene Arthurs, CEO of SPIE the international society for optics and photonics  
**RE:** Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing on Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government  
**DATE:** January 14, 2014

Thank you Senators Carper and Coburn for arranging a hearing on "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government," on January 14, 2014 for the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. We at SPIE are convinced that high-quality technical conferences are the most cost-effective way for federal scientists and engineers to advance their work.

Federal researchers use technical conferences to maintain awareness of advances in their field, collect instant peer criticism and suggestions, build skills by attending training courses and to gather insights into commercialization opportunities. Technical conferences are also an efficient forum for face-to-face meetings with multiple suppliers and collaborators from across the country in one location, saving time and travel.

As budgets decline and research become more complex and interdisciplinary, federal researchers will need to collaborate even more effectively with their peers to gather and filter information. By not participating in technical conferences with their peers from other organizations and those in related fields, government researchers risk becoming isolated and out of touch. They will be limited in their potential for innovation and new discovery.

The scientific community is very concerned by the potential of codifying the 11 May, 2012 OMB travel and conference guidance and/or making the guidance even more restrictive through legislative action. **The OMB released clarification of the original guidance explicitly setting apart scientific conferences as "a cost-effective and efficient means" for collaboration among scientists.**

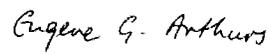
Actions limiting our government scientists' participation in technical conferences will negatively impact long-term U.S. competitiveness as the world's most promising researchers will be discouraged from working for the U.S. government and take their talents elsewhere. Last year at the SPIE defense conference in Baltimore, more people attended technical training courses from government agencies

SPIE is an international society advancing an interdisciplinary approach to the science and application of light.

and labs in Turkey (32) and Singapore (29) than from the US (14). As more government researchers are prevented from attending technical conferences, and more U.S. based conferences are subsequently cancelled, the United States will lose what has been a competitive advantage.

SPIE recognizes the importance of reining in wasteful spending, but restrictions on participation in technical conferences for researchers will hinder scientific discovery, national security, and job growth in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eugene G. Arthurs".

Eugene Arthurs, PhD  
SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics  
CEO

Hello,

I'm writing on behalf of the U.S. Public Policy Council (USACM) of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), in connection with the Senate HSGAC Committee hearing on conference and travel spending held on January 14th. Joanne Carney from AAAS had indicated committee staff was interested in comments for the record, and that we should send them along to you.

ACM is a major scientific and technical society engaged in all aspects of computing and information technology. Part of ACM's work includes hosting conferences on a variety of computing topics.

Back in September 2012, USACM, along with IEEE-USA, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, and the Computing Research Association submitted comments to members of Congress involved with legislation on conference and travel spending considered during the 112th Congress. You can read that letter here:

<http://usacm.acm.org/images/documents/GSAAct2012Letter.pdf>

Since that letter, some members of ACM conference steering committees have expressed additional concerns over the restrictions and their impacts on government scientist participation. They include:

- \* Limited ability for government scientists to participate in conference planning meetings (applies mostly to large conferences)
- \* Limits on conference attendance will disproportionately affect younger scientists, affecting their career development. That could influence a decision to leave federal service.
- \* Simple numerical limits on conference attendance may not be able to address situations where agencies have many distinct research groups and/or efforts that would benefit from participating in the conference.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thanks for your consideration.

Regards,

David Bruggeman  
Senior Public Policy Analyst  
Association for Computing Machinery  
1828 L Street, Suite 800  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
212-626-0542  
212-626-0541 (main line)  
[david.bruggeman@acm.org](mailto:david.bruggeman@acm.org)  
<http://www.usacm.acm.org>



Jan. 29, 2014

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Jan. 14 hearing "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government"

To whom it may concern:

WorldatWork respectfully submits these comments for the record of the committee's Jan. 14, 2014, hearing entitled "Examining Conference and Travel Spending Across the Federal Government." We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the committee.

WorldatWork ([www.worldatwork.org](http://www.worldatwork.org)) is a nonprofit human resources association for professionals and organizations focused on compensation, benefits, work-life effectiveness and total rewards — strategies to attract, motivate and retain an engaged and productive workforce. WorldatWork and its affiliates provide comprehensive education, certification, research, advocacy and community, enhancing careers of professionals and, ultimately, achieving better results for the organizations they serve. WorldatWork has more than 65,000 members and subscribers worldwide; 95 percent of Fortune 500 companies employ a WorldatWork member. Founded in 1955, WorldatWork is affiliated with more than 70 local HR associations and has offices in Scottsdale, Ariz., and Washington, D.C.

Our membership also includes government employees at the federal, state and local levels. Those members participate side-by-side in training sessions and educational coursework with their counterparts in the private sector. The experience and knowledge gained by federal employees from in-person interactions with educators and private sector employees adds value to their agencies and can produce more efficient procedures.

WorldatWork shares the committee's concern that taxpayer money should be spent wisely and with transparent procedures and accountability. As part of a coalition of organizations, we provided several recommendations in April 2013 to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ensure that agencies had both clear guidelines and a set of best practices to plan for future conference attendance. The final protocol adopted by OMB contained several important items, such as a new set of best practices on training-focused events and requiring reports to agencies' inspectors general on conference spending in excess of \$100,000.

Washington, D.C.  
Office & Conference Center  
1100 13<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Suite 800  
Washington, D.C. 20005 USA  
Phone: 202/315-5500  
Toll-free: 877/951-9191  
Fax: 202/315-5550  
Toll-free fax: 866/816-2962

[www.worldatwork.org](http://www.worldatwork.org)



Despite these improvements in the oversight of conference attendance, we remain concerned that potential limitations recently discussed by Congress would result in fewer opportunities for federal employees to participate in important educational offerings. WorldatWork was one of several organizations cosigning a March 18, 2013, [letter](#) in opposition to a Senate proposal to decrease the number of federal employees able to attend off-site training events. We are encouraged by the steps taken by OMB to increase conference spending transparency and do not believe that further limitations on federal employee attendance are warranted at this time.

WorldatWork appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the committee. On behalf of WorldatWork's 65,000 members, we look forward to working with you to ensure that federal employees continue to have access to valuable in-person educational opportunities, subject to appropriate protocols. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Jack Swetland, WorldatWork government affairs manager, at 202-315-5500 or [jack.swetland@worldatwork.org](mailto:jack.swetland@worldatwork.org) for further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cara W. Welch".

Cara Woodson Welch, Esq.  
Vice President, Public Policy, News & Publications



Research Office

210 Halliher Hall  
Newark, DE 19716-1551  
Phone: 302-831-2136  
Fax: 302-831-2828

Senator Thomas Carper  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

February 3, 2014

Dear Senator Carper:

I write on behalf of the University of Delaware, and research universities more broadly, to thank you for holding hearings recently on the topic of government travel and federal employee participation in conferences. This is a timely and important topic.

Every effort should be made to prevent wasteful government spending and thus, it is valuable to review all categories of expenditures. I want to highlight the importance and value of government travel to the United States' research universities and thus, our country's competitiveness. As you are well aware, federal investment in research and development over the past 60 years has led to new technologies that have spawned new industries, provided a foundation for our economic success and ensured an enhanced quality of life. At the University of Delaware, federal funding for Professor Richard Heck led to the catalysis field he developed (for which he received the 2010 Nobel Prize in Chemistry), which has impacted technologies ranging from pharmaceuticals, the human genome sequencing as well as electronics products. Prof. John Elias and his then graduate student, Wayne Westerman used federal research dollars to develop a technology, then a start-up company that laid the foundation for the touch screens in smart phones and other devices that are now commonplace across the globe.

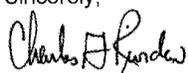
The interactions between federal agency members and researchers are fundamental to advancing fields. Exchanges take many forms, with one important example being participation at professional conferences. As researchers need to stay abreast of the latest developments in their fields, so do the program officers and other federal employees that support R&D. Conference attendance is an effective and efficient means to do so. At conferences, program officers interact with tens of investigators in one place in a short amount of time. They get a strong sense of where fields are heading. Such meetings provide an important venue for young investigators to interact with federal employees showcasing their work and securing valuable feedback. These meetings are important professional development opportunities for the federal employees.

There are certainly savings to be garnered with advances in technology permitting for web-based conferencing. I have participated in remote conferences and panel reviews and encourage the use of technology to reduce travel expenses.

However, web-based conferencing cannot fully replace in-person attendance at meetings. There is a uniquely human aspect to interaction that cannot be replicated via remote conferencing. Casual conversations and incidental interactions at coffee breaks, in the hallways, at meals, etc. form the basis for mutual understanding, which is the foundation of partnerships. Many collaborative efforts have derived from such casual interactions.

Having been a practicing chemist for more than 25 years, I have seen the value of federal employees representing funding agencies at professional meetings. Their attendance is mutually enriching to all parties. Thus, I strongly encourage your Committee to support federal employee travel as a fundamental aspect of the government's work and for the professional development it affords federal employees.

Sincerely,



Charles G. Riordan  
Vice Provost, Research  
Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry  
Email: riordan@udel.edu  
Tel: 302-831-4007