
Office of Inspector General
Audit Report

***Final Report on
Travel Policies and Practices
of Former Political Appointees***

Department of Transportation

Report Number: FI-2001-024

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**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

The Inspector General

Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20590

February 16, 2001

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your request of February 29, 2000, the Office of Inspector General initiated a departmentwide review of policies and practices regarding political activities and travel by Department of Transportation (DOT) employees. Your request posed seven questions pertaining to DOT and asked for interim responses every 60 days.

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

On May 1, July 14, September 8, and November 9, 2000, we provided interim responses to the remaining three questions concerning political travel and campaigning between April 1, 1998, and September 30, 2000. The three questions requested: (1) the number of trips taken by DOT employees or officials involving a mix of official and political travel; (2) whether any staff, including but not limited to protective details or advance personnel, have accompanied political appointees on travel involving a political component; and (3) how much time those employees who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate spent campaigning over

the last 2 years. This response provides answers to the same three questions covering the period October 1 through November 30, 2000.

For the period October 1 through November 30, 2000, DOT employed 83 political appointees (4 were new hires and 4 departed during this period). Of the 83 appointees, 16 were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate (PAS officials), 30 were noncareer Senior Executive Service (SES) officials, and 37 were Schedule C officials.

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

PAS Officials

For the 16 PAS officials, we reviewed all 61 of their travel vouchers and any corresponding travel itineraries for travel from October 1 through November 30, 2000. We also reviewed information provided from their certified responses to our questionnaires. We found that the former Secretary of Transportation took three trips that included a mix of official and political travel, and were subject to the Hatch Act requirements. None of the trips taken by the other 15 PAS officials included a mix of official and political travel.

The Hatch Act requires an employee to apportion the cost of mixed travel based on the time spent on political activities and the time spent performing official duties. For the former Secretary's three trips involving a mix of official and political business, we reviewed DOT's cost allocation for the political portions and found them to be reasonable. DOT has already received the appropriate payments from the sponsoring organizations for the three trips.

Noncareer SES and Schedule C Officials

For the 67 noncareer SES and Schedule C officials, we reviewed all 68 of their travel vouchers and corresponding travel itineraries for the period October 1 through November 30, 2000. We found that four Schedule C officials accompanied the former Secretary on the three trips that included a mix of official and political business. Through our review of travel vouchers, questionnaires and interviews, we found these four officials did not participate in the political events.

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

There were only three trips involving a mix of official and political business between October 1 and November 30, 2000. Eight DOT employees accompanied the former Secretary on these three trips that involved political components. The eight employees consisted of four Schedule C officials and four career employees. Three of the four Schedule C employees were the advance personnel on these trips. The other Schedule C official traveled with the former Secretary only on the nonpolitical part of one trip. The four career employees were members of the Secretary's security detail. The duties for security personnel can include attendance at political events while traveling with the Secretary; however, security personnel may not participate in political events during normal duty hours.

Through our questionnaires and interviews, we found that these eight DOT employees did not participate in any political events while on official travel. We found no violations of the Hatch Act.

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

In our prior responses that covered the 30-month period from April 1, 1998, through September 30, 2000, we reported that 13 of the 22 PAS officials who were employed by DOT during that period did not perform any campaigning. We also reported that during the same period the former Secretary spent 545 hours campaigning or at political events, of which 365 hours were after normal work hours.

The remaining eight officials estimated that the time they spent campaigning ranged from a few hours to 8 days and totaled about 195 hours. Only one of the eight officials campaigned during normal work hours and that was for 2 hours. The other seven officials campaigned on their own time and at their own expense. The Hatch Act allows the Secretary and other PAS officials to participate in political events while on duty.

For the period from October 1 through November 30, 2000, we reviewed travel vouchers and travel itineraries for the 16 PAS officials onboard during that time. We also obtained certified responses to questionnaires from all 16 PAS officials.

Of the 16 PAS officials, 7 did not perform any campaigning. The former Secretary reported spending 141 hours campaigning or at political events, of which 77 hours were on his personal time and 64 hours were during normal work hours. The eight remaining officials reported that they spent 546 hours campaigning during this period. Of the 546 hours, 9 hours were during normal work hours and 537 hours were on their personal time. The Hatch Act allows PAS officials to participate in political events while on duty.

This report concludes our review of the policies and practices regarding political activities and travel by DOT employees. If we can answer any questions or be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-1959, or my Acting Deputy, Todd J. Zinser, at (202) 366-6767.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth M. Mead". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Kenneth M. Mead
Inspector General

cc: DOT Acting General Counsel