

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****Furthering the Mission or Having Fun:
Lax Travel Policies Cost DHS Millions***

February 4, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee hearing entitled “Furthering the Mission or Having Fun: Lax Travel Policies Cost DHS Millions”:

“During the last Administration, at my request, the DHS Inspector General examined the spending practices of the Department of Homeland Security, as it relates to conferences, retreats and similar off-site activities. When the request was made, I was concerned about spending patterns that had been revealed at other government agencies and wanted to see how the Department compared.

Last month, the Office of the Inspector General released the results of its audit, in the form of a report entitled: DHS Conference Spending Practices and Oversight.

The report revealed an extremely troubling picture of not only the amount of money spent, but also a lack of internal controls, minimal oversight, and insufficient reporting throughout the entire Department.

According to the report, from FY 2005 through FY 2007, the Department spent approximately \$110 million on conference-related activities. This money was spent on sending employees across the nation and around the world in 43,989 instances.

For example, the Department spent almost \$30,000 to send 150 CBP employees to a conference in St. Simons, GA; CBP also spent over \$470, 000 on a three-day event in Dallas, TX attended by over 300 CBP employees; furthermore, 320 TSA employees attended a conference in Texas at the cost of \$643,000.

These are just a sampling of the 8,359 conferences attended by Department employees during the relevant time frame.

Let me be clear: by no means am I purporting that Department personnel should not attend conferences or outside training that are reasonable and support the homeland security mission.

However, during the IG investigation, it was determined that in the vast majority of these instances, the Department had not performed cost comparisons to ensure that it was getting the best price available; properly tracked its spending to make certain that it was on par with other budgetary needs; or required justification for expenditures so that it could be shown that legitimate purposes were fulfilled.

None of these things happened. Leaving both Congress and the public with the question: what did we get for our money? Moreover, the depth of mismanagement of taxpayer

dollars that was discovered by the IG was extremely troubling.

According to the report, the data received from the Department was “unreliable, unverifiable and contained little assurance that components properly tracked or accounted for all conferences and related costs.”

When I made the request, I informed the IG that “neither waste nor extravagance by the Department in performance of its critical role should be accepted or condoned.” I meant that when I said it and I continue to stand by that statement now.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the IG made 12 separate recommendations, including increased Department-wide oversight and the development of internal controls to increase accountability and transparency of Department conference activities.

I fully intend to monitor the Department’s progress on these important recommendations.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>