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**Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on
Management, Investigations, and Oversight concerning Travel Policies within the
Department of Homeland Security**

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Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Bilirakis and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss conference spending, practices and oversight within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The Department encourages and supports employee participation in federal and non-federal meetings and conferences. Such events are excellent means to exchange and communicate ideas and knowledge. However, there is also a need to ensure that attendance at meetings and conferences is mission critical, as prescribed in management directives and other policies.

Generally, an employee may attend a meeting or conference when the employee is selected to deliver a paper or to serve as a participant; when attendance will benefit the employee's subsequent job performance; or when substantial professional advantage beneficial to DHS is expected.

We appreciate the Inspector General's recommendations in the "DHS Conference Spending Practices and Oversight" report and concur with the majority of the findings. However, when reviewing the data, it must be noted that the report is based on the Department facilitating conferences and offsite activities for fiscal years 2005 through 2007.

In October 2008, we issued a Department-wide conference planning policy as part of a Travel Handbook within the Financial Management Policy Manual. The handbook delineates DHS-wide policy regarding employee travel expenses and conference planning. The handbook also provides official travel policies and general travel guidance to employees of DHS and our components. The conference planning policy was based on current regulations and guidelines outlined in the Federal Travel Regulation.

In March 2009, the Secretary launched a Department-wide Efficiency Review Initiative to trim costs, streamline operations, eliminate duplication, and better manage resources

across the Department. Elements of the efficiency program, specifically the travel and use of Government facilities initiatives, have already generated Department-wide policies covering the conference planning process. The Secretary's intent is to ensure DHS operates in the most economical and efficient manner possible. Specifically, every effort should be made to conduct meetings, conferences, and training using the least costly method to the Government. DHS will ensure all travel is essential in carrying out its mission and will make every effort, using means such as conference calls, local area events and web-based communications, to reduce costs to the Government.

Building upon the two Efficiency Review initiatives -- regarding the use of Government facilities and regarding travel -- DHS is currently working to establish a comprehensive "One DHS" policy on conferences. In November, 2009, DHS established a Conference and Event Planning Services working group, which has surveyed components to gather requirements for events across the Department and is conducting market and industry research with internal Government event planners. The working group is also developing a resource package with low or no cost alternatives -- such as information on the usage of Government facilities -- for employees to use while planning conferences and events.

The Efficiency Review Action Directive on travel requires each component to designate a senior accountable official to ensure that the component adheres to travel policies and that mission-critical travel is conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Conferences or training events are required to be held within the local commuting area of the majority of the conference attendees; a conference site outside the local commuting area may not be selected unless it is critical for meeting mission needs or an internal cost-comparison analysis has demonstrated that the savings attributable to use of the particular site in question will offset the transportation and per diem costs of the conference attendees. For nationwide conferences, components must perform a cost comparison of location and facility alternatives to ensure requirements are met at the lowest possible cost. Further, both the Action Directive on travel and the Action Directive on facilities require that, when selecting facilities for conferences and meetings, conference planners and approving officials must first survey internal Departmental and other Government resources. All analysis must be provided in

writing and maintained on file by the conference approving official and the component Chief Financial Officer.

We have had some great success stories in our travel and conference planning this year- large and small- across the Department. Examples include:

- A recent Industry Day conference to introduce the EAGLE II procurement used Microsoft Live Web-conferencing, reaching more than 600 participants across the country, generating \$10,000 in cost avoidance.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection restructured its mission support training forum by posting training material on its Web site and by conducting local and web-based training instead of gathering mission support personnel in a single commercial location; these actions avoided approximately \$640,000 in travel and administrative costs.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel utilized U.S. Army lodging facilities in lieu of hotels when attending an advanced firearms training, realizing more than \$188,000 in cost avoidances in FY 2009.
- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services realized a cost avoidance of \$130,000 in FY2009 by replacing a management training that previously required the rental of private facilities with a telephonic training.
- The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center saved more than \$104,000 in travel and per diem costs by holding its biennial Leadership Conference for senior managers at its office instead of a private facility.
- The Transportation Security Administration's Field Leadership Council, an advisory committee comprised of airport Federal Security Directors and Special Agents in Charge, has begun utilizing video teleconferencing in lieu of meeting in person, avoiding \$28,560 in FY2009 in travel and per diem costs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee for your interest in and continued support of DHS programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee about the DHS travel and conference program. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the subcommittee may have.