

SEC. 4006. Eliminating Non-Essential Government Travel

The federal government spent \$13.8 billion a year on travel in 2008, including almost \$5 billion on non-Department of Defense travel, according to data from the Office of Management and Budget.¹ In 2007, federal spending on travel was a billion dollars higher at \$14.8 billion.

Section 4006 would help prioritize federal spending by eliminating wasteful and unnecessary federal travel expenses and by setting an annual, \$5 billion cap on non-national defense, non-homeland security, non-border security, non-national disasters, and other non-emergency travel costs.

The provision would also instruct the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish a definition of and criteria for determining what qualifies as “non-essential travel.” After adoption of the amendment, any expenses related to travel deemed “non-essential” shall *not* be paid for with federal taxpayer funds

Agencies should have high fiscal standards with regard to their travel expenditures and taxpayers should not be asked to pay for non-essential travel. By capping the non-defense, non-homeland security travel costs, taxpayers will realize a savings of approximately \$5 billion over ten years and ensure that agency travel spending does not grow even further beyond the government’s means.

DOD and DHS Have Highest Agency Travel Expenditures, with VA and DOJ Ranking Third and Fourth Highest Across All Agencies for Travel Costs

According to OMB figures, the Department of Defense (DOD) spent \$9.1 billion on airfare, hotels, rental cars and meals in 2008, a figure that was expected to rise by \$200 million in 2009.² The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spent \$1.3 billion on travel expenses. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had the third highest travel costs, spending \$596

¹ Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

² Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

million on travel in 2008, while the Department of Justice (DOJ) had the fourth largest travel budget in 2008, spending \$406 million.³

In 2008, the General Services Administration reported that agencies spent nearly \$4 billion on flights, \$1.9 billion on hotel rooms, and \$437 million on car rentals.⁴

In 2007, the General Services Administration reported that agencies spent \$3.5 billion on flights, \$2.5 billion on hotel rooms, and \$411 million on car rentals.⁵

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT-WIDE TRAVEL EXPENDITURES

<i>Year</i>	<i>Airfare</i>	<i>Hotel Rooms</i>	<i>Car Rentals</i>
2006	\$ 3.3 billion	\$2.3 billion	\$423 million
2007	\$3.5 billion	\$2.5 billion	\$411 million
2008	\$4 billion	\$1.9 billion	\$437 million

Reports indicate that “spending on hotels and cash outlays for travel declined” from 2007 to 2008, and that “smaller alternative airlines and car rental companies saw spikes in business while spending on some more expensive vendors declined.”⁶ Rising airline ticket prices also contributed to the increase in airfare expenditures from 2007-2008.⁷

³ Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

⁴ Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

⁵ “Defense continues to lead the pack in federal travel spending,” *Government Executive*, August 15, 2008, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=40760&dcn=todaysnews. Chart compiled using August 15, 2008 and September 3, 2009 *Government Executive* articles.

⁶ Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

⁷ Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Agencies cut back on travel,” *Government Executive*, September 3, 2009, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=43529&sid=3.

President Obama Highlights Conference Travel Reform as a Way to Cut Back on Government Spending

In his request to his Cabinet Secretaries that they cut \$100 million in their administrative budgets, President Obama highlighted the actions of one agency as an example of how travel reform could save money. The President said:

“Just a couple of examples: Veterans Affairs has cancelled or delayed 26 conferences, saving nearly \$17.8 million, and they’re using less expensive alternatives like videoconferencing.”⁸

Conference Travel Costs Could Be Cut Back, As Examples from USDA, CDC, and DOJ Demonstrate

As President Obama noted, one example of potential savings in federal travel costs would be a reprioritization and re-examination of federal conference attendance.

USDA Employees Went to Vegas and Hawaii and to Vegas and Hawaii Again

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approximately 112,000 employees and in 2006 the agency sent 20,959 employees to as many as 6,719 conferences and training activities across the nation and around the world.⁹ The agency saw a 191 percent increase in conference spending since the year 2000.

Some of these expenditures included sending employees to Las Vegas for “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” conferences, to resorts in Australia for conferences on mushrooms and crawdads, and to Disney resorts to discuss competitive intelligence.

⁸ Lee, Jesse, “\$100 million there, \$100 million here,” *The White House Blog*, April 20, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/04/20/100-million-there-100-million-here>.

⁹ “For the Farmers or for Fun: USDA Spends Over \$90 Million in conference Costs: The first in a multi-part review of how federal agencies have spent billions of dollars on conferences over the last six years,” Oversight Report by the Office of Senator Tom Coburn, M.D., Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services and International Security, May 2008, <http://coburn.senate.gov/public/ files/USDAConferenceTravelReport0.pdf>. Information is based on USDA’s February 5, 2007 response to Ranking Member Senator Tom Coburn regarding “FY2006 Conference and Training Activity,” pages 1 through 254.

In 2006, one entity within USDA, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) sent 47 people (44 of whom were employees) to 10 conferences in Hawaii at a cost of \$71,412. The conferences took place on the Islands of Maui, Oahu, Honolulu, and Molokai.

One Hawaii conference was a “Congressional” seminar to educate attendees on the U.S. Congress, though the event location — the Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort and Spa— is 4,500 miles from Congress. The USDA spent \$13,475 to send six USDA employees to this “Congressional Seminar” conference in Hawaii.¹⁰

According to data submitted to a U.S. Senate oversight subcommittee, in just 2006 alone:

- 213 USDA employees attended approximately 94 separate conferences in Las Vegas at a cost of \$254,755;
- 64 USDA employees (and 3 non-employees on USDA’s dime) traveled to Hawaii to attend approximately 28 separate conferences for a total cost of \$130,600;
- 713 USDA employees attended 235 Sacramento conferences, at a cost of \$560,000;
- 144 USDA employees attended 38 San Francisco conferences, at a cost of \$144,000;
- 270 USDA employees went to approximately 59 separate conferences in Orlando, Florida — home to Disney World — at a cost of \$282,656;
- 112 employees went to 34 conferences in Anchorage, Alaska at a cost of \$227,000;
- 247 employees went to approximately 89 conferences in Phoenix, Arizona at a cost of \$321,000; and
- 141 employees went to approximately 46 conferences in Tucson, Arizona at a cost of \$132,700.¹¹

¹⁰ USDA response to Chairman Coburn’s follow-up questions, December 4, 2006.

¹¹ USDA’s February 5, 2007 response to Ranking Member Senator Tom Coburn regarding “FY2006 Conference and Training Activity,” pages 1 through 254

CDC Conference Expenditures Equaled \$45 Million Over Six Years

In response to congressional inquiry, HHS reported that from FY2000 through FY2005, the CDC spent a total of \$44.7 million on conferences, which includes its HIV/AIDS conference costs.¹² CDC has spent millions on conferences, sending more than 500 CDC employees to international HIV/AIDS conferences, including 157 employees to Vancouver, 90 to Barcelona and 20 to Thailand (down from the 48 originally scheduled to attend).

Recent HIV/AIDS conferences supported by and attended by the CDC, its employees, and its grantees have been described as “boisterous political circuses” for the AIDS industry, and those in it that make a living off HIV and AIDS.¹³ Some examples of CDC attended and funded conferences include:

- A 2002 Barcelona conference that cost U.S. taxpayers \$3.6 million (in HHS costs alone, not including expenditures by USAID and the State Department), where the U.S. Secretary of HHS was shouted down by protestors during his speech. Also in the audience were 236 HHS attendees, including 90 CDC attendees, though the Vatican, which through its Catholic facilities runs 26 percent of all AIDS treatment centers in the world and treats one-in-every-four AIDS patients, was not invited to attend.¹⁴
- A 2004 Thailand conference attended by 17,000 delegates included more than 130 U.S. federal employees, 20 of whom were CDC employees (not including employees stationed in Asia).¹⁵ The event

¹² “CDC OFF CENTER: A review of how an agency tasked with fighting and preventing disease has spent hundreds of millions of tax dollars for failed prevention efforts, international junkets, and lavish facilities, but cannot demonstrate it is controlling disease,” Oversight Report by The United States Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information and International Security Minority Office, Under the Direction of Senator Tom Coburn Ranking Minority Member, June 2007, <http://coburn.senate.gov/public/ files/CDCOffCenter1000.pdf>. October 4, 2005 letter from HHS to Senator Coburn, signed by Assistant Secretary Charles Johnson, CDC “Conference Support Expenditures/Projections by OPDIV/STAFFDIV,” FY2000: \$8,558,352; FY01: \$6,982,795; FY02: \$7,642,681; FY03: \$6,926,825; FY04: \$7,056,486; FY05 Projections: \$7,577,478; for a total of \$44,744,647 (Note: CDC Off Center includes later conferences not reflected in these totals).

¹³ “A Political Circus Is Part of the AIDS Meeting,” op-ed, *The New York Times*, July 20, 2004.

¹⁴ “AIDS Conference Excludes Vatican,” *ZENIT News Agency*, July 11, 2002, www.zenit.org.

¹⁵ “Scientists rip US for cutbacks to global AIDS summit,” *NATURE MEDICINE*, July 2004.

also featured Brazilian dresses made of condoms, a drag show, art shows, and fashion parades.

- A 2006 Toronto conference, attended by 26,000 people, including 78 HHS employees (of whom many were CDC employees), which cost U.S. taxpayers \$315,000.¹⁶ The conference included presentations from researchers who said countries must recognize prostitution as “legitimate legal work.”¹⁷ One convention center exhibit featured three prostitutes lying on a satin-covered bed, which was designed to “look like a typical workplace.”¹⁸ One prostitute from Thailand was described as “standing amid pillows and sex toys in the [conference’s Stiletto] Lounge. To cheers from a crowd of around 200 people, she demanded health insurance, paid vacation and job security.”¹⁹ The conference also featured a workshop on finding a woman’s erotic zone, one on how to apply condoms through “sex stunts,” and a display of explicit artwork, all of which were described as “hugely popular” at the 16th International AIDS Conference.²⁰
- A fall 2006 conference in Hollywood, Florida, drew 3,500 people, of whom 92 were federal employees, including 67 from the CDC. The HIV/AIDS prevention conference cost U.S. taxpayers over \$410,000 and, among other things, included a session on lobbying, a Latin Fiesta featuring a “sizzling fashion show,” and a beach party that included a 15-foot-high sand sculpture of the CDC-funded sponsor’s logo.²¹ The executive director of the conference’s sponsor, NMAC (a group that in 2004 received \$3.9 million in government funds and

¹⁶ May 16, 2006 letter to Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ) from HHS, signed by William Steiger, Special Assistant for the Secretary of International Affairs.

¹⁷ “Legalizing sex trade key to cutting HIV, activists tell AIDS conference,” *The Canadian Press*, August 17, 2006.

¹⁸ “Legalizing sex trade key to cutting HIV, activists tell AIDS conference,” *The Canadian Press*, August 17, 2006.; “Sex workers march for rights at AIDS conference,” *Reuters Health*, August 16, 2006; “Sex workers are part of the solution” workshop, <http://www.aids2006.org/PAG/PSession.aspx?s=961>, accessed January 2007.

¹⁹ “Sex workers march for rights at AIDS conference,” *Reuters Health*, August 16, 2006.

²⁰ “Sex sells AIDS prevention message at conference,” *Agence France Presse*, August 15, 2006; “Where is the Pleasure in Safer Sex?” workshop, <http://www.aids2006.org/PAG/PSession.aspx?s=815>, accessed January 2007.

²¹ “US Conference on AIDS,” Housing Works AIDS Issues Update, September 29, 2006, http://www.hwadvocacy.com/update/archives/2006/09/us_conference_o.html, accessed October 2006; October 2006 HHS response to an inquiry from Senator Tom Coburn’s office reporting that: 5 employees from HRSA, 14 employees from SAMHSA, 67 employees from the CDC, 5 employees from NIH, and one NIH contractor were scheduled to attend and that HRSA spent \$5,827 and CDC spent \$405,000 on the conference; NMAC website, http://www.nmac.org/conferences_trainings/usca/agenda/3893.cfm, accessed October 2006; and e-mailed reports from attendees sent to Senator Tom Coburn’s office.

spent \$1.4 million on conferences and \$1 million on consultants), questioned the government's commitment to HIV/AIDS funding.²²

How Travel Costs May Actually Cost Lives: Funds for Three International Trips to Talk About HIV Could Have Spared 150,000 Infants from HIV

If the funds CDC spent to register 20 employees for a Thailand conference and to send 90 employees to a Barcelona conference to talk about HIV/AIDS, had instead been used to buy and administer Nevirapine (a retroviral drug that costs less than \$4 a dose and has proven to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child with the administration of just two doses), more than 115,000 infants around the world could have been spared from HIV infection.

This does not count the more than 40,000 infants that could have avoided HIV infection if HHS had not sent 78 employees (including an undetermined number of CDC employees) to Toronto to talk about HIV/AIDS at a cost to the federal taxpayers of over \$300,000. For the cost of these three international conferences alone, more than 150,000 newborns could have been treated with Nevirapine and prevented from contracting HIV.

UNAIDS estimates that 1,800 children worldwide become infected with HIV each day, the vast majority of whom are newborns.²³ UNAIDS estimates that in 2005, just less than eight percent of pregnant women in low- and middle-income countries had access to services that could prevent the transmission of HIV to their babies.²⁴

DOJ Spent \$465 Million on Travel in 2007

According to news reports, the Justice Department (DOJ) spent \$18 million more on travel costs in 2007 than in 2006, spending \$465 million in 2007,

²² 2004 National Minority AIDS Council IRS form 990, <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2004/521/578/2004-521578289-021e9463-9.pdf>, Note: the form does not distinguish between federal, state, or local government funding; "AIDS activists urge more funds for treatment," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, September 23, 2006.

²³ "2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic," UNAIDS, http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/2006GlobalReport/default.asp, accessed November 2006.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

up from \$447 million the year before.²⁵ While these costs are not exclusive to conference travel, such travel likely contributed to the increased costs, if historical conference spending trends continued. This spending increase placed the Justice Department third overall among government agencies for the highest travel spending costs, behind only the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.²⁶

DOJ's \$312 Million, Seven-Year Conference Expenditures Included \$4 Meatballs, Congressional Training Sessions in Hawaii, and a Gang Prevention Event at a Palm Springs, Waldorf-Astoria Resort

The Department of Justice spent at least \$312 million over seven years on conference attendance and sponsorship. In 2006, the agency sent 26,000 employees (one fourth of its total workforce) to conferences and spent \$46 million in the process.²⁷

One questionable DOJ expenditure was the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) spending \$33,500 to send 15 employees to a 2006 "Congress Seminar" in Honolulu, Hawaii.²⁸

While the Bureau of Prisons does have a federal prison facility on that particular Hawaiian island, the accommodations at the conference's Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort and Spa likely bore little resemblance to the federal jail cells nearby.²⁹ At least five employees of other DOJ agencies, including one from the "library staff," joined the BOP event goers at this Honolulu conference for an additional taxpayer cost of over \$11,000.³⁰

²⁵ "Defense continues to lead the pack in federal travel spending," *Government Executive*, August 15, 2008, http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=40760&dcn=todaysnews.

²⁶ "Defense continues to lead the pack in federal travel spending," *Government Executive*, August 15, 2008; "Federal travel tab tops \$14B," *The Federal Times*, September 1, 2008.

²⁷ DOJ November 15, 2006, follow-up to questions for the record by Senator Coburn from the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management 2006-2007, pdf page 11, http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=5562f9b6-d8eb-407b-be65-c935837be711. DOJ FY 2006 Resource Information, 205,505 DOJ employees as of September 30, 2006, <http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/annualreports/pr2006/P1/p05.pdf>.

²⁸ DOJ November 15, 2006, follow-up to questions for the record by Senator Coburn, line 427, http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=5562f9b6-d8eb-407b-be65-c935837be711; Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) 2006 conference information, <http://www.fapac.org/htdocs/conference/2006/index.php>, accessed November 2007.

²⁹ Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) 2006 conference information, <http://www.fapac.org/htdocs/conference/2006/index.php>, accessed November 2007.

³⁰ DOJ November 15, 2006, follow-up to questions for the record by Senator Coburn, lines 895, 1225, 1241, 1484, 1503, http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=5562f9b6-d8eb-407b-be65-c935837be711.

Though the event's organizers billed it, in part, as a congressional seminar, the Hilton Hawaiian Honolulu is over 4,500 miles from the U.S. Congress.

Twenty-eight employees from four different DOJ offices spent over \$42,000 to attend a women's conference with a group that works by "influencing Congressional and Administration actions."³¹ It is not clear why Administration employees needed to attend a conference on the taxpayers' dime to learn how to influence themselves.

It is similarly unclear how a luxury resort ended up as the preferred location to discuss gangs. When the average American thinks about a conference on gang resistance, the Waldorf-Astoria Resort in Palm Springs is probably not the first locale that comes to mind. But, that was the location chosen for a 2006 DOJ-sponsored Gang Resistance Education and Training Program conference, which cost taxpayers at least \$278,000. In addition to those direct costs, DOJ grantees were notified that federal gang resistance funds could be used for travel, lodging and meals.³²

DOJ's Expenditures on Conference Travel Could Have Been Used to Hire Hundreds of Prosecutors to Investigate Federal Crimes

If DOJ had chosen to hire attorneys, instead of paying \$46 million for conference travel in 2006, up to an additional 416 lawyers could have been helping to investigate and prosecute federal crimes. If DOJ took its seven-year, \$312 million conference budget and instead hired attorneys, the nation could have been represented by an additional 2,827 lawyers who could have been hired for one year, or 403 attorneys who could have been hired to serve the full seven years.³³

c935837be711; "Library staff" was an additional notation in the non-electronic version submitted to Senate investigators, line 1519, page 43.

³¹ Federally Employed Women's website, <http://www.few.org/history.asp>; DOJ November 15, 2006, follow-up to questions for the record by Senator Coburn, http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=5562f9b6-d8eb-407b-be65-c935837be711.

³² G.R.E.A.T. Conference website, notice to grantees, <http://conference.great-online.org/ConferenceOverview.aspx>.

³³ "Experienced Attorney, 2007 Annual GS Salary Range for Washington, D.C. Area," U.S. DOJ webpage on Salaries, Promotion, and Benefits, <http://www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hpsalary.htm>, accessed August 2008. Calculations based on published DOJ figures which show "experienced attorneys" in the D.C. area with at least four years of experience would earn between \$110,363 and \$143,471 annually. Using the lower end of this pay scale, \$46 million would pay the salaries of 416 attorneys, or 320 could be hired at the higher end of the pay scale. Similarly, using the seven-year conference spending total of \$312 million, 2,827 attorneys with four years or more of experience could have been hired for \$100,363 or 2,174 attorneys at the higher end of the pay scale. The D.C.-area salaries used in these calculations

Yet, instead of hiring more lawyers to prosecute federal crimes, taxpayers paid for airfare, hotel rooms, and food for DOJ employees to attend conferences — 2,199 of them in 2006 alone.³⁴ While some of the DOJ-attended conferences were likely necessary and legitimate expenditures, others might not pass a taxpayer-accountability test.

The Travel Expenditure Cap Would Not Affect Travel Costs Related to National Defense, Homeland Security, Border Security, National Disasters, or Other Emergencies

While this amendment caps government-wide travel costs at \$5 billion a year, it specifically exempts travel costs related to national defense, homeland security, border security, national disasters, and other emergencies.

This Provision Would Add Accountability and Transparency to the Jet-Setting Federal Agencies

It is possible to allow agency employees to travel for essential purposes while at the same time adding transparency and accountability to their travel costs and plans. Taxpayers should not have to pay for unnecessary and non-essential agency travel.

represent a higher salary level due to a locality pay calculation which takes cost of living into consideration. DOJ could have hired even more experienced attorneys if they were to work in areas outside of D.C.

³⁴ DOJ November 15, 2006, follow-up to questions for the record by Senator Coburn from the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management 2006-2007, pdf page 11, http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=5562f9b6-d8eb-407b-be65-c935837be711.