



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Department of Energy

SPECIAL REPORT

DOE-OIG-25-12

January 2025

**CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST:
REVIEW OF THE SECRETARY OF
ENERGY'S ELECTRIC VEHICLE ROAD
TRIP TRAVEL EXPENSES**



Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

January 3, 2025

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHIEF OF STAFF, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF
ENERGY**

SUBJECT: Special Report: *Congressional Request: Review of the Secretary of Energy's Electric Vehicle Road Trip Travel Expenses*

In January 2024, the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Accountability along with the Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs requested that the Office of Inspector General initiate a review of the internal management controls regarding travel by Department of Energy employees and related expense reimbursements. The examples provided in the request pertained to the Secretary of Energy's travel expenses from the *People Powered: Summer Road Trip Brought to You by President Biden's Investing in America Agenda*. The attached report discusses our review of the Secretary's travel expenses for the June 2023 electric vehicle road trip.

We determined that travel vouchers from Department personnel involved in the road trip contained lodging expenses that exceeded Government per diem rates. Additionally, we identified some travel vouchers for which travel expenses exceeded 15 percent of the authorized cost. Further, we found several travel vouchers for which Government-issued travel cards were not used for expenses, as required. We also identified other issues separate from the concerns expressed by the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Accountability. This report contains two recommendations that, if fully implemented, should help to ensure the accuracy of travel authorizations and vouchers. Management fully concurred with our recommendations. We conducted this inspection from February 2024 through September 2024 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020). We appreciated the cooperation and assistance received during this inspection.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Cruz", is positioned above the typed name.

Anthony Cruz
Assistant Inspector General
for Inspections, Intelligence Oversight,
and Special Projects
Office of Inspector General

cc: Director, Office of Management
Deputy Chief Financial Officer

DOE-OIG-25-12



Department of Energy Office of Inspector General

Congressional Request: Review of the Secretary of Energy's Electric Vehicle Road Trip Travel Expenses (DOE-OIG-25-12)

WHY THE OIG PERFORMED THIS INSPECTION

The Office of Inspector General initiated an inspection of the Secretary of Energy's June 2023 electric vehicle road trip travel expenses based on a request from the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Accountability. The request contained examples of staff lodging exceeding per diem rates, travel expenses not included in the original authorization, potential misuse of Government-issued travel cards, and inadequate justifications for potential policy deviations.

We initiated this inspection to determine whether travel expenses for the Secretary's electric vehicle road trip complied with Federal travel requirements.

What Did the OIG Find?

We determined that 36 of the 42 travel vouchers (86 percent) contained lodging expenses that exceeded Government per diem rates. Additionally, we identified seven travel vouchers for which travel expenses exceeded 15 percent of the authorized cost. Further, we found four travel vouchers for which Government-issued travel cards were not used for expenses, as required. Moreover, travel voucher warnings addressing potential policy deviations and issues were unaddressed or inadequately justified. We also identified other issues separate from the concerns expressed by the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Accountability that included: travelers being reimbursed for amounts that exceeded the Department's 15 percent tip policy; travel vouchers with inaccurate temporary duty locations and dates; and cost comparisons for travel to and from alternate locations that were not submitted with the travel authorizations, as required.

These issues occurred because of inadequate reviews of travel vouchers and insufficient knowledge of Federal travel requirements.

What Is the Impact?

The issues we identified in this report were the result of our review of one trip for official Department of Energy purposes, which led to the identification of issues with other trips. According to an Office of Travel Management official, the total cost of official travel for the Department in fiscal year 2023 was \$58.8 million. Department personnel have a duty to be conscientious stewards of taxpayer funds.

What Is the Path Forward?

To address the issues identified in this report, we have made two recommendations that, if fully implemented, should help ensure the accuracy of travel authorizations and vouchers.

BACKGROUND

The mission of the Department of Energy is to ensure America's security and prosperity by addressing its energy, environmental, and nuclear challenges through transformative science and technology solutions. As part of this mission, in June 2023, the Secretary of Energy participated in the Department's *People Powered: Summer Road Trip Brought to You by President Biden's Investing in America Agenda*. The Secretary traveled in an electric vehicle (EV) across four states—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee—for a series of events and townhalls highlighting the Biden-Harris Administration's new and existing efforts to build a clean energy economy, create clean energy jobs, and cut costs for all Americans. The 4-day road trip was part of the Biden-Harris Administration's broader 3-week *Investing in America* tour. Department officials participating in the Secretary's EV road trip included individuals from the Offices of the Secretary; Scheduling and Advance; Public Affairs; Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs; State and Community Energy Programs; Grid Deployment; Manufacturing and Energy Supply Chain; Fossil Energy and Carbon Management; International Affairs; Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; and Environment, Health, Safety and Security's Office of Special Operations.

The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) is established in 41 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapters 300-304. The FTR implements statutory requirements and Executive branch policies for travel by Federal civilian employees and others authorized to travel at the Government's expense. 41 CFR § 301-2.3 requires travelers to exercise the same care when incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business. 41 CFR § 301-71.201 also sets forth a reviewing official's responsibilities to include ensuring that the travel claim is properly prepared; amounts claimed by travelers are accurate; and required receipts, statements, justifications, etc. are attached to the travel claim. Department Manual 552.1-1A, *U.S. Department of Energy Travel Manual* (Department Travel Manual), supplements information contained in the FTR by further clarifying and establishing Department policy on matters that the FTR leaves to agency discretion. The Office of Travel Management serves as the Department's point of contact for, among other things, domestic and foreign official travel. According to the Office of Travel Management, it conducts reviews of reimbursed foreign and domestic travel vouchers to ensure that Department travelers have been properly reimbursed for temporary duty (TDY) travel and extended TDY travel expenses, using specific criteria¹ to conduct post payment audit reviews of travel vouchers.

On January 23, 2024, Chairman James Comer of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Committee); along with Chairman Pat Fallon of the Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs; requested that the Office of Inspector General initiate a review of the internal management controls regarding travel by Department employees and related expense reimbursements. The examples provided in the request pertained to the Secretary's travel expenses from the June 2023 EV road trip. This request followed a September 2023 Committee request after which the Department provided

¹ According to the Office of Travel Management, criteria includes, among other things, travelers on extended TDY (30 days or more); travelers whose travel voucher amounts claimed is greater than \$2,500 (excluding the cost of airfare); and a random sample of the general Department travel population.

documents including 42² travel vouchers from Department personnel involved in the road trip. According to the Committee, these documents revealed instances of staff lodging exceeding per diem rates, travel expenses not included in the original authorization, potential misuse of Government-issued travel cards, and inadequate justifications for possible policy deviations.

Therefore, we initiated this inspection to determine whether travel expenses for the Secretary's EV road trip complied with Federal travel requirements.

LODGING EXCEEDING PER DIEM RATES

We determined that 36 of the 42 travel vouchers (86 percent) associated with the Secretary's EV road trip consisted of lodging expenses that exceeded Government per diem rates. Per diem is an allowance for lodging and meals and incidental expense (M&IE) amounts established by the U.S. General Services Administration. According to 41 CFR § 301-11.303, the maximum amount that a traveler may be reimbursed under actual expense is limited to 300 percent of the applicable maximum per diem rate. Per 41 CFR § 301-11.305, there is no authority to exceed this ceiling. The total cost of the 42 travel vouchers was \$124,823.94.³ The total amount by which lodging expenses exceeded per diem rates was \$9,487.50, with excess costs per traveler ranging from \$50 to \$634 per trip. For example, one traveler was reimbursed \$409 above the allowed per diem rates during a single trip. This included \$199 for one night's lodging in Columbia, South Carolina, which was \$87 over the per diem rate of \$112; \$339 for one night's lodging in Atlanta, Georgia, which was \$176 over the per diem rate of \$163; and \$309 for the last night's lodging in Atlanta, Georgia, which was \$146 over the per diem rate. However, the travel vouchers did not exceed the maximum allowable actual expense limitation of 300 percent.

Travelers could have chosen different nearby hotels to reduce travel costs at the Government's expense; however, Department officials mentioned difficulties finding hotels with functioning EV chargers onsite or nearby. While 41 CFR § 301-11.300 states that actual expense reimbursement is warranted due to mission requirements or any other reason approved within the agency, it also states that reimbursement is warranted when lodging within prescribed allowances cannot be obtained nearby. Department officials informed us that a small number of EVs were used for the road trip—three in the Secretary's motorcade and some other EVs. According to one official, personnel from other Department Program Offices were not required to stay at the same hotel as the Secretary. We found that there were nearby hotels at each location where travelers could have inquired about Government per diem rates or lower than those of the selected hotels with EV chargers. In fact, we identified numerous alternative hotels in each of the four states which were less than a mile away from the chosen hotels.

TRAVEL EXPENSES NOT INCLUDED ON AUTHORIZATIONS

We identified seven travel vouchers whose travel expenses exceeded 15 percent of the authorized cost. Specifically, expenses were not listed in the travel authorization or actual travel

² The Committee's request stated that there were 54 expense vouchers; however, our review determined that there were 42 vouchers.

³ The total cost also included two travel vouchers with expenses for executive protection missions not related to the EV road trip.

voucher costs exceeded estimated costs. The Committee's request identified three travel vouchers with travel expenses that were not included in the original travel authorization. We confirmed that the three travel vouchers consisted of missing travel expenses from the original travel authorization. We also identified an additional four travel vouchers that exceeded at least 15 percent of the travel authorization cost that had travel expenses missing from the original travel authorization. In total, six of the seven travel vouchers we reviewed (including two identified by the Committee) had audit warnings for items that were flagged as questionable, which indicated that the travel voucher cost was not within 15 percent of the travel authorization cost. According to an Office of Travel Management official, these warnings are not policy violations but serve as financial alerts for budgeting officials for that Program Office. These discrepancies were addressed with justifications. Some examples of travel expenses that were missing from the travel authorizations included: an airline flight, three rental car expenses, an expense for an additional night of lodging, and parking fees.

GOVERNMENT-ISSUED TRAVEL CARDS NOT USED

We found travel vouchers for which Government-issued travel cards were not used for expenses, as required. Specifically, we identified four travel vouchers (10 percent) associated with the Secretary's EV road trip for lodging and rental car expenses totaling \$2,552.53 for which travelers did not use their Government-issued travel cards. According to 41 CFR § 301-51.1, the use of the Government-issued travel card is required for all official travel expenses unless the traveler has an exemption. There are financial benefits for Federal agencies using travel charge cards. A Department official informed us that the Department receives approximately a 2 percent rebate based on sales volume. Two travelers informed us that they used their personal credit cards because they had unintentionally left their Government-issued travel cards at home. Another traveler stated that they had reached the Government-issued travel card's credit limit due to a 2-month detail with a Program Office in Washington, DC. While the financial impact to the Department for travelers not using their Government-issued travel card was limited to the 2 percent rebate on sales volume (approximately \$51 dollars), the travelers and approving officials failed to ensure compliance with Federal law mandating the use of Government-issued travel cards. Based on our review of the travel voucher expenses, we did not identify any instances where travel cards were misused.

INADEQUATE JUSTIFICATIONS FOR POTENTIAL POLICY DEVIATIONS

Travel voucher audit warnings to address potential policy deviations and issues were unaddressed or inadequately justified. Potential policy deviations and issues were flagged as audit warnings on the travel vouchers for travelers to address by inputting justifications. Audit warnings informed the traveler of potential issues such as lodging costs over per diem; cash payment methods not matching the payment method of an individually billed account⁴ used for the reservation; and unauthorized travel expenses such as parking.

⁴ Individually billed accounts are Government-issued travel cards issued to employees to pay for official travel and travel-related expenses. The Government reimburses employees for authorized expenses, and the employee is responsible for making payments to the bank.

While we noted several missing justifications on the travel vouchers, there were audit warnings that were repetitive and had already been addressed at least once on the same voucher. For example, a justification on a travel voucher was entered once to address a parking expense that was not on the original travel authorization, but subsequent audit warnings pertaining to parking expenses were left unaddressed. Additionally, some audit warnings were completely unaddressed, which included the following: failure to use a Government-issued travel card; Lyft rides not included in the original travel authorization; parking and gas expenses not on the original travel authorization; and the addition of Charlotte, North Carolina, as a TDY location, not on the original travel authorization, as a per diem location.

We also determined that justifications were inadequate to fully address the audit warnings on the travel vouchers. For example, one traveler's justification for using cash instead of their Government-issued travel card merely stated "authorized." This justification was inadequate because the use of Government-issued travel cards for all travel expenses is mandatory. Additionally, several travel voucher justifications addressing audit warnings for lodging costs that exceeded per diem rates were entered as "mission essential" or "mission critical." These justifications were insufficient to fully explain why the travelers were authorized to stay at hotels that exceeded the Government's per diem rates, as the travelers' justifications failed to address whether additional nearby hotels were taken into consideration to provide cost savings to the Government, and whether there was a need to stay at hotels with EV chargers when only some of the vehicles used for the trip were EVs.

OTHER MATTERS

We also identified other issues separate from the concerns expressed by the Committee that were related to different trips. Specifically, travelers were reimbursed for amounts that exceeded the Department's 15 percent tip policy. Additionally, we found travel vouchers with inaccurate TDY locations and dates. Further, cost comparisons for travel to and from alternate locations were not submitted with the travel authorizations, as required.

Tips Exceeded 15 Percent Policy

Travelers were reimbursed for amounts that exceeded the Department's 15 percent tip policy. According to 41 CFR § 301-10.420, when authorized and approved by the agency, transportation expenses in the performance of official travel are reimbursable for the usual fare-plus-tip when using a taxi, shuttle service, or other courtesy transportation with resulting charges. The Department Travel Manual states that tips, up to 15 percent of the fare, will be allowed for drivers of taxis and other for-hire conveyances. We identified 15 instances associated with 9 travel vouchers for which travelers exceeded the allowable tip amount of up to 15 percent of the trip fare for a total of \$22.49. While the amounts that exceeded the Department's tip policy for each instance ranged from \$0.10 to \$7.35, tipping above 15 percent is noncompliant with the Department Travel Manual. According to the Office of Travel Management, these discrepancies were noted in its post-payment audit reviews of travel vouchers, and the impacted travelers were informed to ensure proper computation is used for future travel.

Inaccurate Temporary Duty Travel Locations

We found travel vouchers with inaccurate TDY locations and dates. Specifically, there were 15 instances associated with 5 travel vouchers for a total of \$12.75 for which lodging receipts did not match the TDY locations for the specified dates on the voucher, and the M&IE amounts on the last day of travel were incorrect. According to 41 CFR § 300-3.1, a TDY location is a place, away from an employee's official station, where the employee is authorized to travel. The locations were all part of the Secretary's EV trip, but the actual dates differed from what were on the travel vouchers. These errors resulted in differences in lodging and M&IE costs, as per diem rates are locality-based allowances that vary by city, county, and state. For example, the TDY location for one travel voucher on June 28, 2023, was for Atlanta, Georgia, with an M&IE per diem rate of \$74. The voucher's hotel receipts depicted that the actual TDY location was Murfreesboro, Tennessee, with an M&IE per diem rate of \$59. The difference of \$15 was overpaid by the Department for that day. Another example consisted of one traveler not claiming the M&IE per diem rate for Memphis, Tennessee, for \$69. The traveler claimed the M&IE per diem rate of \$59 for Murfreesboro, which resulted in \$10 not being claimed on the travel voucher for that day. According to an Office of Travel Management official, the travel authorizations should have been revised prior to departure to reflect the correct TDY locations and dates. Another official noted that travel plans change frequently when traveling with the Office of the Secretary, and the deviations in the travel vouchers were approved by management officials.

Cost Comparison Was Not Submitted — Secretary's EV Road Trip

A cost comparison for travel to and from an alternate location was not submitted with the travel authorization, as required. The Department Travel Manual states that the Department's travel cost between an alternate place and a place of TDY must be less than or equal to the travel cost between the official duty station, or place of abode, and the place of TDY. The Department Travel Manual further requires documentation supporting a cost advantage to be submitted with the electronic travel authorization or retained by the traveler or approving official. Additionally, according to the Office of Travel Management's travel services training video, *Personal travel to an alternate location at the end of official travel*, cost comparisons are to be included with the travel authorization prior to the traveler's departure. One traveler did not develop a cost comparison to fly from their residence in Detroit, Michigan, to Columbia, South Carolina, in June 2023. The traveler's return flight in June 2023 was also back to Detroit. While the traveler resided in Detroit, their official duty station was Washington, DC. Neither the travel voucher nor the authorization included cost comparison documentation.

The Office of Travel Management reviewed this travel voucher based on the issuance of our initial draft report to notify the Department of this issue. The Office of Travel Management informed us that it also identified that the traveler failed to include the required cost comparison, the travel preparer has been trained to ensure that the proper comparison is conducted, and a bill was issued to correct the error.

Non-EV Road Trip Issues — Travel Card Not Used and Cost Comparison Not Submitted

One traveler told us that they had requested an accommodation not to have a Government-issued travel card when appointed to the Department in calendar year 2021 although this request was undocumented. During our discussion in April 2024, the traveler explained that they had not traveled frequently and was only recently informed of the need to submit the travel card application form. However, we found that the traveler participated in 23 separate trips from December 2021 through April 2024, which included the Secretary’s EV road trip. Our review resulted in the identification of an additional 22 travel vouchers for lodging, rental car, and gas expenses worth \$7,977.57 for which the traveler did not use a Government-issued travel card. While the financial impact to the Department for the traveler not having used their Government-issued travel card was limited to the 2 percent rebate on sales volume (approximately \$160 dollars), the traveler and approving officials failed to ensure compliance with Federal law mandating the use of Government-issued travel cards. According to the Office of Travel Management, the traveler now has a Government-issued travel card and has been trained on its proper use.

Additionally, we determined that a cost comparison was not submitted with another traveler’s original travel authorization that involved official international travel to Germany and personal travel to Italy. The original travel authorization specified for the traveler to fly out of Washington, DC, to Berlin, Germany, in May 2023. However, the traveler’s return flight back to the U.S. was not from the TDY location in Germany, but from Milan, Italy. While the itinerary eventually changed for the traveler to fly back to the U.S. from Italy to Charlotte, North Carolina, to participate in the EV road trip, a cost comparison was neither submitted with the original travel authorization nor was it provided to the official who approved the travel authorization. Additionally, a fully documented cost comparison was not retained by the traveler prior to departure for international travel because the traveler was unable to provide evidence of cost estimates for the original travel authorization’s return flight from Italy to Washington, DC. Based on our review of documentation that the traveler was able to provide, it did not appear that the Government incurred additional expenses; however, it is imperative to fully adhere to the cost comparison requirements to safeguard against the optics of combining personal travel with international travel. The Office of Travel Management reviewed this travel voucher based on the issuance of our initial draft report to notify the Department of this issue and informed us that it addressed the error.

INADEQUATE REVIEWS AND INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF REQUIREMENTS

The issues we identified occurred because of inadequate reviews of travel vouchers and insufficient knowledge of Federal travel requirements. For example, when we asked one traveler whether a cost comparison was created prior to their authorization to travel from their alternate location in Detroit rather than their official duty station in Washington, DC, the traveler stated that they did not even know what a cost comparison was or what that entailed. Additionally, officials approved travel authorizations without the required cost comparison documentation. One approving official stated that they have never received a cost comparison for any travels that they reviewed and approved. Other inadequate reviews by approving officials included one

travel voucher that did not identify missing hotel and rental car receipts and another voucher for which the traveler was reimbursed \$30 more for lodging than what was paid according to hotel receipts.

The Office of Travel Management provides resources to educate Department personnel about Federal travel requirements. For example, as of February 2024, the Office of Travel Management section on the Department's website contained travel services training videos on an official's role when approving travel vouchers and personal travel to an alternate location. Additionally, travel card training was also available to inform Department personnel about the FTR and other travel policies. Office of Travel Management officials also informed us that Program Offices can request training directly from the Office of Travel Management. For example, an Office of Travel Management official informed us that it conducted travel policy and travel card training in July 2024 with the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs.

IMPACT

As public service members, Department personnel responsibilities include planning travel and incurring expenses to minimize costs for the Government and being familiar with travel requirements. The issues we found in this report were identified resulting from our review of one trip for official Department purposes, which led to the identification of issues with other trips. According to an Office of Travel Management official, the total cost of official travel for the Department in fiscal year 2023 was \$58.8 million.

An Office of Travel Management official informed us that its travel voucher audit findings involved missing receipts; travelers entering incorrect amounts for reimbursement; tipping above the Department's 15 percent policy; issues with incorporating personal time with business travel; and M&IE errors (similar to the issues we identified). Ultimately, it is the Program Office and the preparer's responsibility to be aware of travel requirements. Department personnel, including those traveling with the Secretary, have a duty to be conscientious stewards of taxpayer funds. Conscientious stewardship is particularly crucial for matters involving high publicity. Personnel must ensure that resources are used appropriately, cost-effectively, and only as necessary to fulfill the Department's mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary of Energy, ensure that travelers and approving officials from Program Offices who participate in official travel with the Secretary:

1. Adequately review travel authorizations and vouchers for accuracy of travel expenses; and
2. Receive refresher training regarding the FTR and Department Travel Manual requirements and responsibilities.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Management fully concurred with our recommendations. Management stated leadership will reinforce the importance of reviewing travel authorizations and vouchers for accuracy with this initiative to be completed by December 31, 2024. Additionally, management will provide refresher training on the FTR and the Department Travel Manual to all approving officials with a completion date of March 31, 2025.

Management's comments are included in Appendix 3.

INSPECTOR COMMENTS

Management's response and proposed corrective actions are fully responsive to our recommendations.

Appendix 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

OBJECTIVE

We initiated this inspection to determine whether travel expenses for the Secretary of Energy's electric vehicle road trip complied with Federal travel requirements.

SCOPE

The inspection was performed from February 2024 through September 2024 at Department of Energy Headquarters at the Forrestal Building in Washington, DC, and the John A. Gordon Albuquerque Complex in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The scope was limited to select Department Program Offices' travel expenses and reimbursements associated with the Secretary's electric vehicle road trip during fiscal year 2023. The inspection was conducted under Office of Inspector General project number S24AL014.

METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our inspection objective, we:

- Identified applicable criteria (e.g., laws, regulations, Department directives, Department Program Offices' policies and procedures, etc.) related to official travel;
- Obtained and reviewed travel vouchers, cost comparison documentation, receipts, and other relevant documentation to determine whether travel expenses were incurred in accordance with Federal travel requirements and reimbursed accurately;
- Conducted interviews with the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Accountability and Department officials from the Offices of the Secretary; Travel Management; State and Community Energy Programs; Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs; Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; Environment, Health, Safety and Security's Office of Special Operations; the National Nuclear Security Administration's Office of Secure Transportation; Public Affairs; Manufacturing and Energy Supply Chain; and Scheduling and Advance;
- Determined whether flights to and from alternate locations other than the traveler's official duty or temporary duty locations were supported with cost comparison documentation;
- Reviewed justifications for potential policy deviations on travel vouchers and determined whether the justifications were adequate; and
- Reviewed travel authorizations and associated travel vouchers for which voucher expenses exceeded 15 percent of the authorized costs.

Appendix 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology

We conducted our inspection in accordance with *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (December 2020) as put forth by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. We believe that the work performed provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

We held an exit conference with management officials on December 16, 2024.

Appendix 2: Related Reports

Department of Energy Office of Inspector General

- Inspection Report: [*Inspection of the Secretary of Energy's Foreign Travel*](#) (DOE/IG-0397, October 1996). The report identified \$4.58 million, excluding salaries and overtime, spent by the Department of Energy for Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary's overseas travel from June 1993 through December 1995. The Secretary's 16 overseas trips included 4 trade missions to India, Pakistan, China, and South Africa. The Department identified numerous non-monetary outcomes resulting from the trade missions. However, the Department had not always been clear in describing the monetary outcomes. The inspection also identified a number of internal control deficiencies regarding the administration of the Secretary's foreign trips such as embassy support costs, overtime costs, and chartering aircraft.
- Inspection Report: [*Allegations Regarding Management Conduct Within the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity*](#) (DOE-OIG-22-18, December 2021). The report substantiated the allegation that the former Office of Economic Impact and Diversity Director claimed travel expenses that were not allowable under 41 Code of Federal Regulations, Chapters 300-304, Federal Travel Regulation; and the Department of Energy Manual 552.1-1A, *U.S. Department of Energy Travel Manual*. The inspection examined a sample of 37 travel vouchers and found that the former Director was overpaid for his travel expenses by a net of \$14,129.93. The overpayments were a result of the former Director's lack of adherence to travel regulations during his travel and incorrect coding in the Standard Accounting and Reporting System.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General

- Report of Investigation: [*Katherine A. Lemos, Former Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board*](#) (Report No. 23-N-0020, June 2023). This report determined that Dr. Katherine A. Lemos, the chairperson of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) at the time, improperly used CSB funds for travel. The report found that Dr. Lemos' use of CSB funds for travel from her residence in San Diego to her official duty station in Washington, DC, constituted a violation of the Federal Travel Regulation. Additionally, Dr. Lemos' use of funds for her travel to Norfolk, Virginia, to participate in an embarkation on a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier violated the Federal Travel Regulation because her travel was not for official CSB business. Further, the expenses for Dr. Lemos' travel to Atlanta and Houston were improperly calculated based on departures from her residence in San Diego rather than her official duty station in Washington, DC, as required by the Federal Travel Regulation.

Appendix 3: Management Comments



Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

December 3, 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR TERI L. DONALDSON
INSPECTOR GENERAL

FROM: CHRISTOPHER DAVIS
CHIEF OF STAFF

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Davis".

SUBJECT: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Special Report:
*Congressional Request: Review of the Secretary of Energy's Electric
Vehicle Road Trip Travel Expenses*

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the subject OIG draft advisory memorandum, which transmits the results of the OIG's review of travel taken by Department of Energy (DOE) officials supporting the Secretary's electric vehicle (EV) road trip.

Organizing and executing travel to support a cabinet official is often the most complex, fluid, and difficult travel-planning environment that departmental staff face. As the Department explained to the OIG, plans change often, quickly, and at the last minute. Flexibility is paramount and time is at a premium, while at the same time some security and logistical considerations are non-negotiable. As OIG notes, this trip involved coordinating the participation of almost a dozen different DOE offices. It was perhaps the most challenging and dynamic domestic trip undertaken by Secretary Granholm and her supporting staff during the entire Biden-Harris Administration.

Even in these extremely demanding situations, the Department remains committed to adhering to travel rules. Consistent with the Department's efforts to continually review and enhance internal controls, DOE agrees to implement the OIG recommendations. While the Department plans to take additional actions to improve controls regarding the approval of travel, DOE notes that the exhaustive OIG review did not identify significant areas of noncompliance, substantive financial impacts, or systemic concerns.

To address some of the specific observations made by the OIG:

- **Per Diem Lodging Rates.** The OIG notes that some lodging expenses exceeded standard per diem rates. These lodging expenses were, however, allowable under Federal Travel Regulations, and the lodging locations chosen were consistent with the trip objectives. Sometimes, when traveling in larger groups, appropriate rooms are not always available at the per diem rate for all travelers. The data reported by the OIG show that the total lodging expense for the trip was approximately 8.2 percent higher than the expense that would have been incurred using standard per diem rates.
- **Use of Government Travel Card.** The OIG notes that there was no misuse of government travel cards. It did identify a few cases where employees did not use a government travel

Appendix 3: Management Comments

card, as required, but DOE staff who accidentally left their travel cards at home followed appropriate protocol for those circumstances. The financial impact of the noncompliance, as reported by the OIG, was approximately \$51.

- **Travel Expenses Not Included on Authorizations.** The OIG reports that the cost of seven approved travel vouchers was more than 15 percent above the original estimated cost included in the travel authorization. As the OIG confirmed, however, this is not a violation of travel policy. The 15 percent threshold is intended to alert approving officials of the actual cost of the trip, so that they can take that into account for their budgetary planning going forward.
- **Narrative Justifications for Potential Policy Deviations.** The DOE travel system is set up to flag any issue that may warrant additional attention by the reviewing official. The traveler is required to provide a narrative justification for these system-generated flags. While the Department agrees that some individual travelers could have responded more clearly to these system-generated flags, this issue does not represent noncompliance with federal travel rules, and certainly does not indicate that associated travel costs are unallowable.
- **Tips Exceeded Policy.** The Department agrees that these tips are not fully reimbursable. However, as reported by the OIG, the financial impact of this issue is \$22.49, and the Department has taken action to inform affected travelers of the 15 percent tip policy.

The OIG also reported two instances where a cost comparison was not submitted, and a single traveler that did not utilize the government travel card for 23 separate trips. These specific issues have been addressed by the Department.

Please direct any questions regarding the response to the OIG recommendations to Milton Hilliard Jr, Director, Office of Travel Management, (202) 586-3577 or Milton.hilliard@hq.doe.gov.

Appendix 3: Management Comments

Management Response

Draft Special Report:

“Congressional Request: Review of the Secretary of Energy’s Electric Vehicle Road Trip Travel Expenses”

Recommendations

We recommend that the Deputy Secretary ensure that travelers and approving officials from Program Offices who participate in official travel with the Secretary:

1. Adequately review travel authorizations and vouchers for accuracy of travel expenses; and:

Management Response: Concur

Review of travel authorizations and vouchers is already required. DOE leadership will provide a communication to offices that reiterates existing requirements to review travel authorizations and vouchers for accuracy of travel expenses.

Completion Date: December 31, 2024

2. Receive refresher training regarding the FTR and Department Travel Manual requirements and responsibilities.

Management Response: Concur

The DOE Office of Management will provide refresher training to all approving officials regarding the FTR and Department Travel Manual requirements and responsibilities.

Completion Date: March 31, 2025

FEEDBACK

The Office of Inspector General has a continuing interest in improving the usefulness of its products. We aim to make our reports as responsive as possible and ask you to consider sharing your thoughts with us.

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