



For Immediate Release

Thursday, February 18, 2010

Grassley questions spike in international travel costs for federal employees

WASHINGTON – Senator Chuck Grassley has asked the Secretary of Health and Human Services to address increased costs of international travel by agency employees.

A newly obtained department memo shows that in fiscal 2008 there was a six percent increase in the number of federal employees traveling internationally and a nearly 14 percent increase in the costs of that travel. More than 95 percent of the international travel was by employees of the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control. These three agencies fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Human Services.

In a letter to the Secretary, Grassley asked if the trend continued during the last fiscal year.

“According to the report, the increased costs were not caused by travel to more distant locations but by travel at the higher business-class fare, and that raises questions about whether department policies are being followed to make sure official travel isn’t any more expensive than it needs to be,” Grassley said. “I look forward to receiving more information from the department about these travel expenses.”

The text of Grassley’s letter to Secretary Kathleen Sebelius follows here.

February 17, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

As the senior senator from Iowa and Ranking Member of the United States Committee on Finance (Committee), I have a duty to conduct oversight of the executive branch, including the activities of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/Department). This duty includes monitoring HHS activities and conducting oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used appropriately.

Today I write regarding international travel by HHS employees during Fiscal Year (FY) 2009. I am in receipt of a memo from the Department titled "Fiscal Year 2008 International Travel Summary." I have attached a copy of that memo for your review. The memo details the total number of HHS international travelers, the total estimated international travel costs, and the average cost per traveler in FY 2008:

	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Change from FY 07</b>
<b># of international travelers</b>	11,688	6.27%
<b>Travel costs</b>	\$63,192,925	13.78%
<b>Average cost per traveler</b>	\$5,407	0%

The memo also lists international travel information by agency, with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) employees constituting over 95% of the Department's international travel. In FY 2008 travel for both FDA and CDC employees cost much more per trip than employees at other agencies, a cost that was not attributable to distance or remoteness of destinations, but instead to business-class expenses. As the four agencies with the most international travelers and the most travel costs, NIH, CDC, FDA, and the Office of the Secretary (OS) all experienced growth in both their total travel costs and average cost per traveler:

	<b>Total travel costs</b>	<b>% change from FY 2007</b>	<b>Avg. cost per traveler</b>	<b>% change from FY 2007</b>
<b>NIH</b>	\$20,790,491	5.14%	\$4,185	5.76%
<b>CDC</b>	\$29,170,916	16.37%	\$6,187	2.06%
<b>FDA</b>	\$10,340,683	20.57%	\$6,992	7.62%
<b>OS</b>	\$2,324,992	54.71%	\$5,856	45.74%

While this growth may be attributable to a number of factors, including H1N1, I write to learn whether these trends continued into FY 2009 and what you anticipate in 2010. To assist me in this matter, please provide a list of the following:

- 1) number of international travelers,
- 2) total estimated travel costs,
- 3) number of days of travel,
- 4) number of countries visited, and

5) the average cost per traveler. Please provide this information delineated by each HHS agency.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I request that your agency provide a response by no later than March 3, 2010.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley  
United States Senator  
Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance