



Report Summary

SEPTEMBER 2016

Background

In early 2015, a confidential complainant contacted the Office of Inspector General (OIG) alleging potential policy and regulatory violations taking place in the office of a high-ranking Political Appointee.¹

The complainant's specific allegations included that:

(1) Political Appointee may have been improperly seeking reimbursement at above-standard per diem rates for stays in premium hotel accommodations while on official travel;

(2) Political Appointee's staff may have been inventing business reasons to accommodate some of Political Appointee's personal travel plans when responding to questions from Department oversight officials; and

(3) Political Appointee had his office renovated at a cost that might exceed what is permitted by law.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Investigation into Travel & Other Improprieties in the Office of a Politically Appointed Official

OIG-15-0444-I

WHAT THE OIG FOUND

The evidence developed over the course of our inquiry established that a variety of problems arose in Political Appointee's office during his tenure with the Department, including:

- Political Appointee receiving unjustified reimbursements on multiple occasions for luxury hotel stays in violation of the Federal Travel Regulation and Department policy, and a member of his staff receiving questionable reimbursements for premium car service expenses associated with Political Appointee's trips;
- A member of Political Appointee's staff providing inaccurate or knowingly false information to Department officials in response to inquiries about Political Appointee's travel arrangements;
- Political Appointee's impermissible use of a staff member for handling non-official personal business; and
- Political Appointee's agency paying for potentially unauthorized or otherwise questionable expenditures related to the renovation of his office space.

WHAT THE OIG RECOMMENDED

The OIG recommended that that the Department consider taking several actions, including:

(1) Ensuring that any employee making travel arrangements or approving travel reimbursements for politically appointed officials receives training on governing travel regulations and policies;

(2) Providing newly appointed political officials with guidance on (a) regulations and policies governing the use of subordinates for non-official business, (b) restrictions against the use of their title or position for personal gain or creating the appearance of such use, (c) key regulations and policies governing official travel, and (d) the advisability of monitoring renovation work done to their office suites to ensure the cost of such work does not contravene congressional budget restrictions;

(3) Reviewing the renovations to Political Appointee's office suite to determine whether expenditures associated with those renovations exceeded the \$5,000 limit imposed by Congress and whether the expenditures therefore contravened the Anti-Deficiency Act; and

(4) Implementing procedures requiring thorough documentation to support the categorization of any work performed on a politically appointed official's office suite as general or routine maintenance as opposed to renovation work subject to congressional budget restriction.

¹ The names of people referenced in the OIG's report are masked and masculine pronouns are used throughout to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.