

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

Majority (2009) 225-5061  
Minority (2009) 225-5074

June 3, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I am writing to request documents and information relating to the extent to which White House political personnel are involved with planning, directing, or coordinating your travel to participate in public events – official or political – which may have a political benefit for elected Democratic officials or Democratic candidates for office.

As you may know, during the last Congress then-Chairman Waxman and this Committee invested substantial time and effort to investigate the use of official resources at the behest of the White House for political purposes. During the Committee's investigation – which spanned nearly two years – the staff interviewed or deposed 18 political appointees, including President Bush's political directors, and received nearly 70,000 pages of documents from the White House and 29 agencies.

At the conclusion of his years-long investigation, Chairman Waxman's staff prepared a staff report entitled "The Activities of the White House Office of Political Affairs."<sup>1</sup> Chairman Waxman called for the elimination of the Office. The Waxman Report stated:

The White House Office of Political Affairs has been controversial since President Reagan created the office in 1981. . . . But the extent of political activity by the . . . White House and its deep and systematic reach into the federal agencies is unprecedented.  
**Congress should amend the Hatch Act, the federal law**

<sup>1</sup> Democratic Staff, H. Comm. on Oversight and Gov't Reform, 110th Cong., "The Activities of the White House Office of Political Affairs," Oct. 2008, <http://oversight.house.gov/documents/20081015105434.pdf>.

**restricting political activity by federal officials, to eliminate the White House Office of Political Affairs.** If the political affairs office is retained, its activities should be restructured to ensure that it serves the interests of the taxpayer, not the political party of the President.<sup>2</sup>

In the report, the Waxman staff concluded that the White House organized the travel of senior administration officials around politically advantageous locations and specifically used travel as a tool to help elect or re-elect members of their party to public office.<sup>3</sup> The report counted events that were attended personally by senior administration officials. It reported that 303 events required travel outside of Washington, D.C. The Waxman staff concluded that these events violated the Hatch Act. They wrote the events “established precisely the type of ‘political boiler-room’ that the Congress warned against when it amended the Hatch Act in 1993.”<sup>4</sup> The report stated that the taxpayers “should . . . not pay the travel expenses of cabinet and other senior officials to fly across the country” for political purposes.<sup>5</sup>

During President Obama’s short time in office, there has been some indication that the White House has ignored Chairman Waxman’s concerns. For example, according to a *Washington Post* story last year about travel related to marketing of the President’s stimulus plan, “public policy and electoral politics have come together seamlessly in his domestic travel itinerary.”<sup>6</sup> The *Post* reported:

Since becoming president, he hasn't set foot in a state he won by nearly 40 percentage points in November's general election.

**But thousands have heard Obama speak in Ohio, North Carolina, Missouri, Indiana and Florida, all among the 16 states he has visited since taking office. In each of those places, his margin of victory or defeat last November was fewer than five percentage points.**

\* \* \*

On nearly every trip he has taken, **Obama has followed the timeworn path of presidential travel -- go where the votes matter most.**

\* \* \*

---

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at ii (emphasis supplied).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at i (Executive Summary).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Scott Wilson, *Obama’s Travel Mixes Policy, Politics*, WASH. POST, June 21, 2009.

But the travel suggests a White House far more interested in electoral politics than its leader and senior staff members publicly acknowledge. **The swing-state stops are just one element of a West Wing political operation** that has preserved many practices of preceding ones, and that takes into account the dynamics of the 2010 midterm elections and the next presidential race in deciding where to spend Obama's time.

Of the 16 states Obama has visited, nine shifted from the Republican to Democratic column in 2008. Five of the states are among the six that posted the narrowest margins of victory for either Obama or Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), and are likely to remain the most closely divided through the coming campaign cycles.

\* \* \*

Obama has raised money in California, Indiana and Nevada, and election law calls for the government to be reimbursed for those explicitly political aspects of his travel.<sup>7</sup>

Last June, *Politico* similarly reported administration officials have traveled to at least 66 events across the country to tout the stimulus program, but the events were almost exclusively tied to obviously politically motivated destinations. According to *Politico*:

Since Congress passed President Barack Obama's \$787 billion economic stimulus bill in February, **administration officials have traveled to at least 66 events across the country** to tout the massive spending program or hand out stimulus cash to grateful local officials.

\* \* \*

Top officials have hosted events predominantly in states that Obama won in 2008.

What's more, the examination revealed that Obama officials all but avoided Southern states that Obama lost.

\* \* \*

---

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

**But the numbers tell the tale: 52 of the 66 events were in states that backed Obama.** And taken together, the itineraries amount to a veritable map of Obama's election-night victories — big-money states like California and New York, swing states like Ohio and Colorado that Obama turned blue and other solidly Democratic states Obama kept in his column.<sup>8</sup>

This is precisely the type of political travel former Chairman Waxman spent years investigating. This is what he deemed Hatch Act violations.

I am interested in developing a better understanding of whether the types of political travel Chairman Waxman invested so much time and energy attempting to eradicate are still occurring. To assist the Committee in learning more about this Administration's practices with regard to political travel, I request that you provide the Committee with the following information:

1. Provide a list of all events with elected officials or candidates for office that you attended outside of Washington, D.C., in an official capacity during the time period February 1, 2009 to the present. For each event, please provide the date and location of the event, a brief description of the purpose of the event, the identity of the elected officials or candidates for office attending the event, and a statement declaring whether taxpayer funds were used to travel to the event.
2. Provide a list of all events with elected officials or candidates for office that you attended outside of Washington, D.C., for political purposes, whether it be a fundraiser, rally, or other political function, during the time period February 1, 2009 to the present. For each event, please provide the date and location of the event, a brief description of the purpose of the event, the identity of the elected officials or candidates for office attending the event, and a statement declaring whether taxpayer funds were used in part to travel to the event.
3. All documents, including emails, that relate to the involvement of White House officials in scheduling, suggesting, coordinating, or directing public events with elected officials or candidates for office for any official at the Department during the time period February 1, 2009 to the present.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee in the House of Representatives and has broad oversight jurisdiction as set forth in House Rule X.

---

<sup>8</sup> Eamon Javers, *A Political Pattern to Stimulus Tour*, POLITICO, June 5, 2009 (emphasis added).

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
June 3, 2010  
Page 5

We look forward to your response by June 17, 2010. You may contact Steve Castor of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5074 if you have any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Edolphus Towns, Chairman

2010-06-03 DEI to Cabinet Members - request info Personal Travel due 6-17

List of Cabinet Members:

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Timothy F. Geithner  
Robert M. Gates  
Eric H. Holder, Jr.  
Kenneth L. Salazar  
Thomas J. Vilsack  
Gary F. Locke  
Hilda L. Solis  
Kathleen Sebelius  
Shaun L.S. Donovan  
Ray LaHood  
Steven Chu  
Arne Duncan  
Eric K. Shinseki  
Janet A. Napolitano  
Lisa P. Jackson  
Peter R. Orszag  
Karen G. Mills  
Martha N. Johnson  
Mary L. Schapiro  
Charles F. Bolden, Jr.