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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3214

October 22, 2004

The Honorable David Walker
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

I write to ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the use of taxpayer funds to pay for what appear to be campaign-related trips by three senior Administration officials. According to press accounts, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, and Secretary of the Treasury John Snow have made numerous speeches in key battleground states during the 2004 campaign.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Ms. Rice has traveled - or will travel - to Oregon, Washington, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Florida.¹ Ms. Rice's travel during an election year appears to break from a longstanding precedent of national security advisors not being involved in presidential campaigns. During her speeches, Ms. Rice has "sounded at times like a candidate" and has echoed the Bush campaign's attacks against Senator John Kerry.²

In the case of Secretary Ridge, nearly three-fifths of his public events are in 17 hotly contested states in the presidential election.³ Although Secretary Ridge has said, "We don't do politics in the Department of Homeland Security," he and his senior aides have held public events in Florida 16 times, in Pennsylvania 13 times, and in Ohio 7 times since March 2004.⁴ Since January 2003, senior DHS officials have participated in four events in Iowa, a battleground state. In contrast, these same officials have participated in only two events in a less competitive state, New Jersey, which has its financial sector under a heightened terror alert.

¹*Rice Hitting the Road to Speak*, Washington Post (Oct. 20, 2004).

²*Id.*

³*Ridge, Others Head to Battleground States*, Associated Press (Oct. 20, 2004).

⁴*Homeland Officials Visit 17 Campaign States*, Associated Press (Oct. 20, 2004).

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Finally, Secretary Snow will have made 38 taxpayer trips to a campaign battleground states after his trip to Orlando, Florida today, and 32 of his 43 domestic out-of-town trips this year have been to one of those states.⁵ According to press reports, 19 of 21 “speeches or chats” Snow has made outside of Washington since August 6 have been in a battleground state.⁶ During his speeches, Mr. Snow seemed to closely follow Bush campaign talking points when he was quoted as saying, “As a result of the president’s economic leadership, we have overcome a recession and seen 13 straight months of job creation...and the president’s tax reform policies have ensured lower income-tax bills for more than 4.6 million Pennsylvanians.”⁷ Secretary Snow’s campaign schedule seems very unusual for a top Cabinet official and very troubling if taxpayer dollars are indeed paying for this type of partisan politicking.

These senior Administration officials, two of whom are deeply involved in fighting the war on terror, are making campaign appearances at the same time that terrorism is on the rise and American soldiers are dying every day in Iraq and Afghanistan. I ask that GAO open an investigation into the following issues:

- (1) The number and the total cost of the trips taken by National Security Advisor Rice, Secretary Ridge, Secretary Snow, and senior DHS officials outside Washington since January 1, 2004;
- (2) The portion of these trip costs that have been covered by the Bush-Cheney campaign, the Republican National Committee, the National Republican Congressional Committee, National Republican Senatorial Committee, or a state Republican party;
- (3) Whether the trips were for legitimate government purposes;
- (4) What process was used to determine whether these trips were free from partisan, political considerations in order to decide whether they were campaign trips (paid for by the campaign) or official business (paid for by the taxpayer).

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Orly Isaacson of my staff at (202) 225-7944 or at orly.isaacson@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

⁵*Treasury Sec. Snow Campaigns Hard for Bush*, CBS MarketWatch (Oct. 21, 2004).

⁶*Snow’s Job: Spreading Economic Cheer*, Washington Post (Oct. 20, 2004).

⁷*Id.*