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October 29, 2004

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

Dear Mr. Walker:

Earlier this week, I wrote to you to request an investigation of the apparent campaign activities in electoral battleground states by three Bush cabinet officials. These activities appeared to be in their official, government capacities, paid for by the American taxpayer, not by the Bush-Cheney Campaign. Those three – Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and Treasury Secretary John Snow – are in charge of two of the most vital issues our nation faces: security and the economy. There have been a number of news reports revealing their extensive travel and appearances, purportedly for official business, even as our nation is under a serious terror threat.

Today's *Washington Post* reports that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) developed a public relations strategy to be used during the campaign season to enhance public perception of the security of our nation. According to the report, a political appointee in the Customs and Border Protection bureau distributed a 90-day strategy to "maximize" the media, "brand" the agency, "change perception," and "reassure the citizens of the United States." The article goes on to say that at least one media event specifically outlined in the strategy took place on Oct. 4.¹

I would like to add to my original request a request for an investigation of this media strategy at DHS and the use of official resources to implement it.

There are a number of questions that need answers including:

- How much of the public relations strategy has been carried out by DHS?

¹*Homeland Security Disavows Document Touting Successes*, The Washington Post (Oct. 29, 2004).

- Was the intent of developing the public relations strategy to influence the 2004 election?
- Has there been an increase in public relations activity by the Customs and Border Protection bureau since the memo was distributed, reportedly in mid-September?
- Has there been an increase in Customs and Border Protection bureau public relations activities in the most contested states in the 2004 presidential election?
- Have the public relations activities undertaken by customs and border officials taken them away from substantive homeland security work for any period of time?
- Is there evidence of similar public relations strategies or memos in other DHS agencies?

As the chief of public affairs for the Customs and Border Protection bureau, Dennis Murphy, said, "Our job is not public relations.... It's to communicate facts."² Because the job of the Department of Homeland Security is to secure America, and not to communicate the mere *perception* that America is secure or to embark on a public relations initiative to influence the campaign, I believe it is vital to examine the nature of the public relations plan. I ask that you add these questions to the previous request for an examination of cabinet members' campaign activities.

Thank you, and if you have any questions, please have your staff contact Orly Isaacson of my staff at (202) 225-7944 or orly.isaacson@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

²*Id.*