

July 31, 2009

The Honorable Hilda Solis
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Solis:

The American Hotel & Lodging Association and its 17,000 members are writing to you today to ask for your assistance in reversing a policy that may exist in your department. This informal policy, which ostensibly prohibits or discourages government meetings and conferences in cities which are known to attract conventioners or vacationers, has been the subject of numerous news reports in recent weeks. It has also been the subject of correspondence between Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel.

Mr. Emanuel wrote in his July 14 letter that he agreed that federal policy should not dictate the location of where government event are held. He also wrote, "For me, the test of government travel is what will be accomplished by that travel and whether the cost to government is reasonable as opposed to other options."

AH&LA and our members, plus their 1.8 million employees, agree with Majority Leader Reid and Chief of Staff Emanuel. It is our stated opinion that the U.S. government should make their meeting location selections based on such tangible factors such as overall cost, appropriate meeting facility space, and quality of services provided in a particular city, convention facility, or specific hotel or resort. It should not rely on something as vague as "perception" when defining its travel destinations for its employees.

Government travel for meetings, conferences, and seminars is an important source of economic activity for many communities throughout the United States. Every U.S. destination should have an equal and fair opportunity to host their federal government's meetings and events.

While some cities may be more enjoyable to travel to for leisure, the same cities are also proud to host serious business meetings and conferences. Many hotels that cater to leisure travelers also boast superior conference facilities that are designed to accommodate many business travelers who ask for comfortable facilities to better

conduct their meetings and attract more attendees. They have decades of experience handling conferences of all sizes and have the services needed for tourism.

AH&LA applauds the government for sheparding the taxpayer's money, especially in the current economic downturn. But the association also believes that federal agencies and corporations are going too far to avoid the appearance of wasteful spending during a recession that is also hurting the workers of the U.S. lodging and travel industries.

There is always room to cut and reduce government expenditures. But to do so at the cost of jobs and economic growth is a false choice, and one that the U.S. lodging and travel industries hope does not become an expedient way to generate favorable publicity at the expense of American jobs.

I would encourage a dialogue between your department and the American hotel and lodging industry if this policy exists in your organization. If you wish to reach me and discuss this important issue, please do not hesitate to call me at 202-289-3100.

I thank your for your very kind attention to this matter, and remain

Yours sincerely,

Joseph A. McInerney, CHA