



From the Inspector General

“Holding the Line...on official travel”

Actual case studies for navigating the sometimes not-so-bright line defining senior official misconduct

The Complaint: Each issue of “Holding the Line” will be dedicated to a common complaint levied against senior officials. This edition addresses using one’s official position for private gain in travel situations. The three cited cases illustrate a “not substantiated” finding (“holding the line”), a “substantiated” finding (“crossing the line”), and one somewhere in the middle (“walking a fine line”).

The applicable standard: The Joint Ethics Regulation (DoD5500.07-R)—Federal government employees, including uniformed and civilian members of the Air Force, are prohibited from using their official government positions for private gain. This includes “actual” violations as well as “perceived” violations.

The Cases:

1 - HOLDING THE LINE: A general officer schedules her annual fall visit with her units and troops overseas for ten days immediately following a reunion at her overseas-based high school. After travel to her TDY location, she takes leave to attend the high school reunion in another city. She ultimately returns to her TDY location and begins her official itinerary of site visits, traveling to various regional locations and to an adjacent AOR. Has she violated the JER?

IG Finding: Misuse of public office for private gain—**NOT SUBSTANTIATED**; the evidence established that the subject’s trip was planned and executed based on mission needs and for a mission-essential purpose, and there was an annual precedent for the travel. Her personal travel itinerary was finalized after her official TDY itinerary became final.

Top 5 Trouble Areas:

- Travel claims violations
- Failure to show subordinates dignity and respect (toxic leadership)
- Improper use of GOV
- Misuse of subordinate’s time
- Unprofessional relationships

2 - CROSSING THE LINE: A member of the Senior Executive Service lives apart from his family so that his daughter can finish high school. He frequently schedules TDYs during the holidays at the locations where his family resides or at locations where his family will be vacationing for the holidays, such as Florida and California. Has he violated the JER?

IG Finding: Misuse of public office for private gain--**SUBSTANTIATED**. The senior executive effectively “forced” TDYs to his home city and vacation locations to coincide with holidays and his family’s travel plans. The timing and locations of the TDYs were neither mission-essential nor mandatory, nor were they consistent with his past practices; rather, he “cherry-picked” his TDY dates and venues to help subsidize family vacations, i.e., to personally benefit himself and his family members.

3 - WALKING A FINE LINE: A general officer is traveling on official business, in uniform, on a commercial aircraft. Prior to boarding, he is notified electronically that as a frequent flier member, he has been upgraded to first class. (His frequent flier account does not include his military rank.) He accepts the upgrade sits in first class in uniform. Is this allowable? *You decide...*

IG Finding: The general’s actions were not strictly prohibited by the JER, Joint Travel Regulation (JTR), or the GO Handbook. However, AFI 36-2903 states that members should avoid wearing the uniform to avoid the public perception of misuse of government travel resources. In this instance, although “danger close and not recommended, the allegation was **NOT SUBSTANTIATED**. However...

Questions to determine if you’re “Holding the Line”:

- Is the TDY timing and planning “driven” by a mission-related purpose or personal agenda?
- Did the need for the TDY arise prior to the desire/need for personal travel or was the TDY created after the personal plans were made?
- Would a reasonable person (taxpayer), with knowledge of the relevant facts and circumstances, perceive this travel to be ethically allowable?
- How does this look to an Airman?

"Relativity applies to physics, not ethics." ~ Albert Einstein

If you have any ethics-related questions, contact your servicing SJA or local ethics officer!

“Holding the Line” is a product of SAF/IGS. Please contact Ms. Allison Weber at allison.c.weber.civ@mail.mil or 703-692-6345 if you have questions or a suggestion for a future edition of this newsletter.