January 17, 2014

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
100 Constitution Avenue, NE
Room 340
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Coburn
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
2 Constitution Avenue, NE
Room 172
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Coburn:

As the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee considers the current state of travel spending across the federal government, the Entomological Society of America (ESA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the effect of federal travel policies on the scientific enterprise. ESA supports appropriate oversight and transparency of federal employee conference participation and travel expenditures to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse. However, ESA urges the Committee to consider how current policies have unintentionally restricted productive interactions among government, industry, and academic entomologists, thereby hindering scientific progress critical to our nation's health, agriculture, security, and economic prosperity.

With nearly 7,000 members affiliated with academic institutions, health agencies, private industry, and state and federal governments, ESA is the largest organization in the world serving the professional and scientific needs of entomologists and individuals in related disciplines. As the premier event of the society, the ESA Annual Meeting is the largest meeting for insect scientists in the world. The meeting provides a unique opportunity for a wide swath of the entomology community – including federal scientists and practitioners working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. military, among other federal agencies – to come together to discuss the latest research findings, exchange ideas, and form professional networks for collaborative projects and prospective employment. The ESA Annual Meeting is the premier forum in the United States where entomologists can interact face-to-face to exchange ideas and explore new ones; this kind of interaction is invaluable, and research advancements in entomology are hindered when federal scientists are unable to participate.

By attending the ESA Annual Meeting, federal employees can make valuable professional contacts, update their technical skills, and present their research, all of which are activities that serve to enrich their scientific expertise in areas that advance American agriculture, protect the environment, and keep American citizens and soldiers safe from insect-borne diseases. For example, entomologists study insects and other arthropods that spread West Nile virus, malaria, Lyme disease, and dengue. In addition, the ability to better monitor the invasive insect species that devastate crops, protect the beneficial insect species that serve as pollinators, and control the insect pests that significantly damage infrastructure has important implications for the entire American economy. Because each entomological sector approaches these scientific challenges from a different perspective, it is in our national interest to foster innovative collaborations across the entire enterprise of entomology.

Scientific conferences, such as the ESA Annual Meeting, also provide important career development opportunities. At the ESA Meeting, students and other early-career entomologists are able to interact with leaders in their field, gain experience presenting their data, develop a better knowledge of the larger scientific
landscape, and network with potential future employers and career mentors. Participation by federal scientists in scientific meetings is a key component to training the future science and technology workforce for the public and private sectors.

**Given the importance of entomology research, extension, and education to our nation’s federal science and technology priorities and capabilities, we encourage you to support policies that ensure appropriate oversight without disadvantaging entomologists and other scientists, including those who serve our country as federal employees.** The freedom to share ideas, collaborate, and discuss new advances in research is a hallmark of U.S. leadership in scientific innovation and should be encouraged rather than stifled.

Thank you for considering these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact ESA if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Frank Zalom, Ph.D.

President, Entomological Society of America
Professor of Entomology, University of California, Davis