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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
 WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

July 10, 2013

Via Electronic Transmission

The Honorable Charles F. Bolden, Jr.
 Administrator
 National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 Two Independence Square
 300 E Street, SW
 Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator Bolden:

Recently, you said that if the sequester continues, you will “have to furlough civil servants.”¹ I am also concerned about the effects of the sequester, however, it remains critical that agencies like National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) do all they can to reduce costs and improve productivity in their existing workforce. I am concerned that in NASA’s case, federal tax dollars may still be spent on non-mission critical activities.

For example, I recently received information that at least four NASA employees, including highly paid SES employees, participated in a so-called “Physics in Vogue” photo-shoot, dressed in Viking garb. The shoot appears to have been conducted on a Friday in December during normal working hours and depicts NASA employees growling, yelling and brandishing replica swords and daggers. The photo-shoot purports to illuminate NASA’s research into the groundbreaking miniature satellites, known as CubeSats, although these satellites were in fact developed in 2004.² One caption on the website hosting the photographs reads,

“Space Vikings: NASA Ames Research Center leads the charge in small satellite innovation and development while evoking the Viking spirit of exploration and adventure. NASA Ames Center Director Dr. Simon P. Worden poses alongside the Vikings of Bjornstad for this photograph to personify that spirit and highlight NASA leadership in the modern space

¹ Dan Leone, “Bolden: NASA is a \$16 billion agency if sequester continues in 2014,” *SpaceNews* (Apr. 25, 2013), available at <http://www.spacenews.com/article/civil-space/35058bolden-nasa-is-a-16-billion-agency-if-sequester-continues-in-2014>.

² Leonard David, “Cubesats: Tiny spacecraft, huge payoffs,” *Space.com*, (Sept. 8, 2004), available at <http://www.space.com/308-cubesats-tiny-spacecraft-huge-payoffs.html>.

age. The next generation of small satellites, known as CubeSats, float above and herald a new era in space exploration and science.”³

The website, www.vedphoto.com, features photographs and videos from the shoot and are on sale for \$170-\$1,200.⁴ The photographs are part of a larger subset in an exhibition project titled, *Physics in Vogue*, which “...aims to shed light on profound contemporary physics discoveries by combining fashion photography, laboratory grade optical effects and scientific accuracy to create visual representations of complex science.”⁵ The photographer is also an employee at the NASA ARC. It does not appear that any of this money will be returned to NASA or the Federal government.

The “Vikings of Bjornstad,” a living history group who participated in this photo-shoot, have said that this project was financed in part by a Stanford University Angel Grant.⁶ The twenty-six photographs and videos, taken in a Palo Alto park, depict individuals dressed in Viking attire alongside what appear to be replica CubeSats. It is unclear how or from what materials the models of the satellites were constructed. The actors are joined in the photographs by ARC Director Dr. Simon P. Worden, ARC Chief of Staff Karen Bradford, and ARC Executive Secretary Carolina Rudisel who are all dressed in the likenesses of Vikings, complete with makeup done by local beauty artist, Inna Matthews.

In order to better understand the participation of NASA employees and resources in this for-profit photography exhibit please respond to the following questions:

1. When did you become aware of this photo-shoot?
2. Was this a NASA sanctioned photo-shoot? If so, who authorized the participation of these employees?
3. Was NASA public affairs made aware of the participation of these employees in this photo shoot?
4. How many NASA employees or contractors took part in this specific photo-shoot?
5. Will NASA receive any funds from Stanford or the photographer?
6. Aside from the employees’ official time, were any other NASA resources used in the execution of this project, including but not limited to: government vehicles for transportation, construction materials for props, or computers for processing the images?

³ Available at <http://www.vedphoto.com/spacevikings/h5035d9e8#h50346466>.

⁴ Available at <http://www.vedphoto.com/spacevikings>.

⁵ Available at <http://www.vedphoto.com/physics-in-vogue>.

⁶ Available at http://www.vikingsofbjornstad.com/NASA_Ames.htm.

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7. When, at what time of day, and for how long was the photo-shoot conducted? If it was conducted during work hours, was Annual Leave used by the employees present? If not, why not?

Thank you for your cooperation and attention to this letter. I would appreciate a briefing at your earliest convenience regarding the above questions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Chris Lucas in my office at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member