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Councilman Zine Cuts Per Diem Costs and Further Restricts City Taxpayer Funded Travel

LOS ANGELES, March 22, 2011 – Continuing efforts to cut unnecessary spending and save taxpayer dollars, Councilman Dennis P. Zine's motion to place additional restrictions on authorized City travel and eliminate all per diem costs associated with any travel passed with a 13-0 vote at today's City Council meeting. This call for a ban on per diem costs comes in the wake of news reports that commissioners from Los Angeles' housing authority board took per diems for travel expenses and also charged meals to their agency credit cards. CBS2 reported that the commissioners spent more than \$150,000 over the last two years on travel and food.

"Every dollar counts and it is outrageous for the City to continue to cover food costs and other incidental expenses in these dire times. Just because somebody is traveling for City business, does not mean there should be an expectation for the City to pay for that person's lunch," said Assistant President Pro Tempore Dennis P. Zine. "We don't pay for their meals when they are working in Los Angeles, today we are saying there's no free lunch when you're traveling either."

Councilman Zine has led the effort to restrict City travel; in December of 2009, he introduced a motion asking for a complete review of all travel expenses by City staff and commissioners. Through that motion, it was discovered that a total of \$1.8M was being appropriated for travel during the 09-10 fiscal year. Councilman Zine's action prompted the Mayor and Controller to issue a joint memo restricting all travel to be limited to the following exceptions: (1) Travel to Sacramento and Washington, D.C. to participate in City advocacy (2) Travel by members of the Los Angeles Police Department for investigations, warrants, and extraditions and (3) Travel related to prevention of liabilities or fiscal degradation. All other travel exemptions needed to be approved by the Deputy Mayor of Budget and Finance.

Today's action further restricts travel by eliminating Deputy Mayor-approved travel completely and takes the next step to protect taxpayer dollars by banning all per diem associated costs.

"Today's action represents another step toward creating a more responsible government," said Councilman Zine. "Our financial situation is bleak and we are running out of options. We must focus on critical core services and prioritize our funds."

Councilman Zine has also led the effort to reduce the number of city issued cell phones and has introduced a motion to ask for a review of Los Angeles City Department General Manager and Assistant General Manager salaries. Councilman Zine has taken a voluntary 10% pay cut and his entire staff is currently taking unpaid furlough days.

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