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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BATON ROUGE -- Today, the State Inspector General's Office issued a report detailing its investigation into losses incurred because of unused airline tickets that were allowed to expire. The investigation revealed that since 2006, 58 state agencies purchased non-refundable airline tickets that cost at least \$229,853, and those tickets expired because they were not used within one year of the scheduled travel dates.

The Inspector General's report notes that the total loss is probably significantly higher than \$229,853 because the State Travel Office and Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) -- who held the state travel contract through June 30 of this year -- were unable to locate some of CWT's monthly reports on expired tickets since 2006. CWT and the State Travel Office could not provide 19 of the 52 monthly reports for the period of January 2006 through April 2010. The missing reports make it impossible to determine the full amount of public funds used to purchase airfares that expired and lost all value. However, projections using monthly averages suggest that the total loss could exceed \$362,000.

Apart from the cost of tickets that were allowed to lose their value, the Inspector General's report also notes a related problem. The State Travel Office advised the Inspector General that two employees of CWT had converted some state-purchased airline tickets to their personal use. The CWT employees converted more than \$16,000 in airline tickets to credit vouchers, which they then used to obtain 19 airline tickets for their personal benefit.

Inspector General Stephen Street said: "We can never afford to pour hundreds of thousands of dollars down the drain, which is essentially what happened when these airline tickets were allowed to expire. We simply have to be better stewards of the taxpayers' money."

The Inspector General's report makes several recommendations to address the issues raised in its investigation. The Inspector General explained: "State agencies need to track their unused tickets more closely, so that the one-year deadline to use them or lose them doesn't make the value of those tickets disappear. It appears steps are being taken to make sure this doesn't happen in the future."

To obtain the full report, follow this link:

<http://oig.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/reports/CID-10-006.pdf>