

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 20, 2017

The Honorable Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Inspector General
330 Pennsylvania Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Inspector General Levinson:

We are writing to request that you conduct a review of Secretary Tom Price's adherence to federal regulations and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) policies and procedures for travel. This request follows a troubling report by *Politico* that Secretary Price recently used privately chartered flights to travel within the Northeast United States on HHS business over the course of three days, which was estimated to cost "tens of thousands of dollars more than commercial travel."¹ The report also quoted current and former staffers who indicated that "Price has been taking private jets to travel domestically for months."² If these reports are confirmed, it would represent yet another troubling example of this Administration's continued willingness to skirt basic ethics rules.

Pursuant to federal travel regulations, "[b]ecause the taxpayers should pay no more than necessary for your transportation, generally you may travel on Government aircraft only when a Government aircraft is the most cost-effective mode of travel."³ The definition of "Government aircraft" includes chartered aircraft.⁴ HHS's own Travel Policy Manual further states that "[t]ravel must be most advantageous to the Government, when cost and other factors are considered; travel must be by the most expeditious means of transportation practicable and commensurate with the nature and purpose of the duties involved."⁵ Given these requirements, it is unclear why Secretary Price would require such costly travel in these instances when more economical options were reportedly available.⁶

¹ *Price's private-jet travel breaks precedent*, *Politico* (Sept. 19, 2017).

² *Id.*

³ 41 CFR § 301-10.260.

⁴ 41 CFR § 301-10.403.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *HHS Travel Policy Manual* (Nov. 1, 2014), section 3.1.1.

⁶ *See* note 1.

Despite these regulations and policies, reports indicate that Secretary Price's chartered flights over three days cost an estimated \$60,000 or more.⁷ Secretary Price's September 15th chartered flights to and from Philadelphia alone reportedly cost approximately \$25,000 for about 11 individuals. *Politico* notes that there were several other travel options available that likely would have cost significantly less, including a commercial flight that departed 5 minutes before Secretary Price's chartered flight.⁸

In addition to potential violation of federal regulations and policies, these reports are particularly troubling given Secretary Price's repeated statements regarding his intentions to reduce the waste of taxpayer dollars. For example, in a statement accompanying the President's budget submission—which included drastic cuts to vital programs, such as the nearly \$6 billion proposed cut to the National Institutes of Health—Secretary Price affirmed his “commitment to preventing waste, fraud and abuse across the department” and the “streamlining of activities at our agencies to ensure we are providing the highest level of service possible and not duplicating efforts.”⁹ It is unclear how Secretary Price's reported travel practices align with these stated intentions.

Our Committees have longstanding interests in ensuring effective agency controls regarding leadership and staff travel and reducing the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse. Therefore, we ask that you conduct a review to determine whether Secretary Price's travels were in compliance with all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures. We request that your review include a determination of the following:

1. On how many occasions to date did Secretary Price utilize government aircraft and/or privately chartered aircraft?
 - a. How much did these trips cost federal taxpayers?
2. For each occasion, please determine the purpose of the trip and whether the trip was solely dedicated to the stated purpose. If any trip was not solely for official government purposes, please list the personal, recreational, or other purpose of the trip.
3. To what extent were all applicable federal travel regulations and agency travel policies and procedures appropriately followed for all of Secretary Price's travels to date?
 - a. In each of the instances in which a chartered flight was used, were the appropriate travel authorizations, cost estimates, justifications, and approvals performed?

⁷ See note 1.

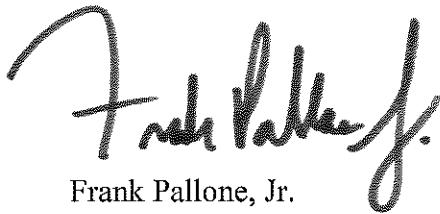
⁸ See note 1.

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Secretary Price Statement on President's Budget Blueprint* (Mar. 16, 2017).

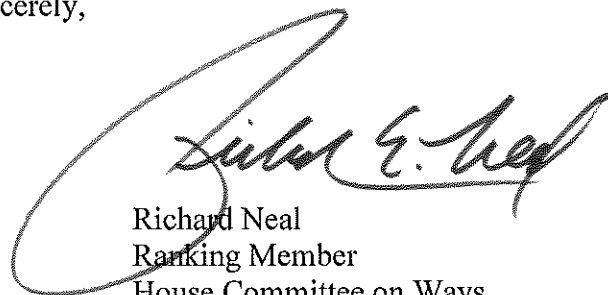
- b. In each of the instances in which a chartered flight was used, what justification was provided for not flying commercially? Were these justifications approved according to Department policies and procedures?
 - c. For each of the chartered flights taken by Secretary Price to date, what was the total cost of travel for Secretary Price and all other individuals onboard? What was the cost for each individual onboard for each chartered flight?
 - d. For each of the chartered flights taken by Secretary Price to date, who were the other passengers on board each flight? Who was in charge of booking the flights? Were all policies and procedures, as required by the Federal Travel Regulation and the HHS Travel Policy Manual, in addition to other relevant requirements, followed for each of the passengers onboard and by anyone involved with booking or planning the travel? Were the appropriate policies and procedures followed for any passengers who were not federal government employees?
 - e. In any instances in which regulations, policies, or procedures were not appropriately followed, what was the approximate cost incurred to the government as a result?
 - f. Is there a mechanism for Secretary Price to reimburse taxpayers for the costs incurred?
4. Did any HHS personnel raise concerns internally about Secretary Price's repeated use of privately chartered flights? If so, how were such concerns addressed?
 5. To what extent has HHS conducted oversight of executive travel, including Secretary Price's travels by chartered flight? Have any violations been identified, and if so, what actions were taken in response?

American taxpayers deserve assurances that their tax dollars are not wasted by the government's highest officials, and we are committed to holding Secretary Price to his stated pledges to reduce waste throughout the Department. Therefore, we appreciate your prompt and thorough review of these issues.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy
and Commerce



Richard Neal
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways
and Means

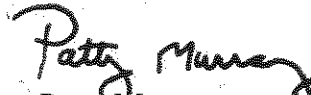
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Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee



Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions



Gary Peters
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Spending
Oversight & Emergency Management
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
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