

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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November 30, 2017

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden:

I am writing to urge you to hold oversight hearings on members of the Trump Administration using private planes and government aircraft at significant taxpayer expense. This request follows troubling news reports on non-commercial travel by several cabinet members. For example, former Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tom Price was “taking private jets to travel domestically for months” on at least 26 trips from May to September, costing tax payers at least \$400,000.¹ In another case, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt reportedly traveled on private planes several times, including flights in Colorado in August, 2017² and Oklahoma in July, 2017.³ In yet another example, Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Rick Perry used a private plane and government aircraft at significant taxpayer expense, including one flight from Washington, D.C. to Kansas for which DOE authorized up to \$35,000.⁴ It is unclear why cabinet members would repeatedly and blatantly abuse taxpayer funds with costly travel when more economical options were reportedly available.

¹ *Price investigation continues to roil HHS*, Politico (Nov. 13, 2017).

² *3 Cabinet Officials Under Fire for Taking Costly Flights*, CBS News (September 26, 2017).

³ Twitter Account of COBS News Correspondent Julianna Goldman (<https://twitter.com/juliannagoldman/status/913164025986502656>).

⁴ Memorandum from Department of Energy Chief of Staff Brian McCormack to Department of Energy Deputy General Counsel Eric Fygi (May 11, 2017).


The Committee has an ongoing responsibility to continue conducting active oversight of this important issue. In a recent Committee proceeding, you stated that you have already sent letters on this issue.⁵ Specifically, you stated “[w]e are asking questions of every agency about their travel, or virtually every agency, and we have already sent letters ... We will do our oversight investigations as appropriate along the way with agencies.”⁶

I request that you follow through with your stated intention to conduct oversight on this issue, including scheduling oversight hearings to examine why the aforementioned travel using non-commercial aircraft occurred and whether related taxpayer expenses were warranted.

It is critical that we ensure there are effective Agency controls that exist to prevent the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse related to leadership and staff travel. To date, Democratic Members of Congress, including this Committee, have sent letters to Inspectors General at HHS, EPA, and DOE, prompting ongoing probes into whether the excessive non-commercial travel by members of the Trump Administration is in compliance with all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures.⁷

American taxpayers deserve assurances that their tax dollars are not wasted by the government’s highest officials. As the Energy and Commerce Committee, we have an obligation to conduct active and responsible oversight of our agencies of jurisdiction. I urge you to schedule hearings on this important matter as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member

⁵ House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Full Committee Markup (Oct. 4, 2017).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Rep. Diana DeGette, and Rep. Paul Tonko, to EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins (Jul. 28, 2017); Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Rep. Richard Neal, Sen. Ron Wyden, Sen. Patty Murray, Sen. Gary Peters, to HHS Inspector General Daniel Levinson (Sept. 20, 2017); Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Rep. Diana DeGette, and Rep. Paul Tonko, to EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins (Sept. 27, 2017); Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Rep. Diana DeGette, and Rep. Bobby Rush, to DOE Acting Inspector General April Stephenson (Oct. 12, 2017).