

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 21, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

We are writing to gain a better understanding of the current policies and oversight mechanisms governing official travel by Cabinet appointees and other high-ranking federal officials. As we perform our obligation to serve as responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, we are concerned by reports that a number of current high-ranking appointees, including Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, may be incurring excessive travel costs.¹ Taxpayers appear to be footing the bill for extraordinary travel expenses using government resources and providing Cabinet officials with private aircraft at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars where commercial flights are readily available. These incidents give us concern that there is a culture of wasteful spending on travel in the Trump Administration.

The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) stipulates that all federal agencies “must select the method most advantageous to the Government, when cost and other factors are considered.”² Further, the FTR states that travel by common carrier, such as a commercial airline, “is presumed to be the most advantageous method of transportation and must be used when reasonably available.”³ However, recent news reports suggest that Secretary Price has demonstrated a pattern of chartering private aircraft to conduct official government business at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars when commercial flights or other, more economical means of travel appear to be readily available.⁴ Existing travel regulations reflect the general principle that instead of taking advantage of the public trust, public servants should always strive to perform their duties in the best interest of the American taxpayer.

The Inspectors General for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Treasury have already announced investigations into the travel expenses incurred by Administrator Pruitt and

¹ *Price’s private-jet travel breaks precedent*, POLITICO (Sept. 19, 2017) (www.politico.com/story/2017/09/19/tom-price-chartered-planes-flights-242908).

² 41 C.F.R. § 301-10.4.

³ *Id.* at § 301-10.5.

⁴ *Price’s private-jet travel breaks precedent, supra.*

Secretary Mnuchin, respectively.⁵ In order for Congress to better understand the current state of compliance with federal statutes and regulations, we respectfully ask for answers to the following questions on or before October 6, 2017:

1. Who in the government is entitled to travel by private chartered aircraft, and under what circumstances?
2. Please provide an accounting of the use of private chartered aircraft by Cabinet officials over the last three administrations.
3. What policies and procedures are in place regarding the use of military aircraft by Cabinet appointees and reimbursement to the Department of Defense (DoD) for the cost of operating these aircraft?
4. What policies and procedures govern interagency reimbursement for official and non-official travel by Cabinet appointees?
5. What is the extent of the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) oversight of Cabinet-level travel?
6. Has OMB promulgated any policies, circulars, memoranda, or other guidance since January 20, 2017, regarding official travel by members of the Cabinet? If so, please provide a copy of each of these documents.
7. OMB Memorandum M-12-12, issued on May 12, 2012 pursuant to Executive Order 13589, required the DoD and the General Services Administration, in consultation with OMB, to undertake a review of existing policies and regulations to "ensure that, whenever practicable, Federal employees arrange airfare in a manner that results in the lowest price available when traveling on domestic flights."⁶ Has OMB issued any policies or guidance since that time to supersede this stated goal of ensuring the lowest cost to the taxpayer for travel expenses?

⁵ *EPA inspector general to investigate agency chief's travels to Oklahoma*, REUTERS (August 28, 2017) (www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-epa-pruitt/epa-inspector-general-to-investigate-agency-chiefs-travels-to-oklahoma-idUSKCN1B821U); *Treasury inspector general to review Mnuchin's flight to Fort Knox*, WASHINGTON POST (August 31, 2017) (www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/treasury-inspector-general-to-review-mnuchin-flight-to-ft-knox/2017/08/31/d9e122d4-8eb2-11e7-91d5-ab4e4bb76a3a_story.html).

⁶ Memorandum from Acting OMB Director Jeffrey Zeints, *Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations (M-12-12)* (May 11, 2012) (obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2012/m-12-12_0.pdf).

It is our duty to provide oversight and ensure that taxpayer money is spent responsibly, without waste, fraud, or abuse. We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



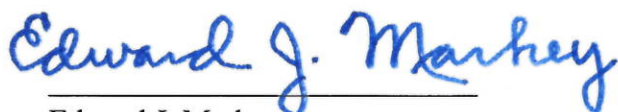
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



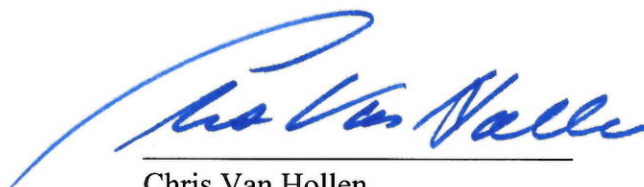
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



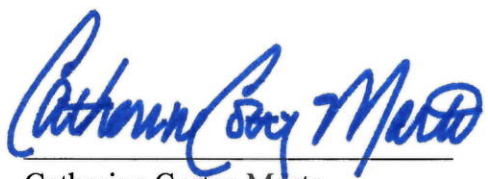
Jack Reed
United States Senator



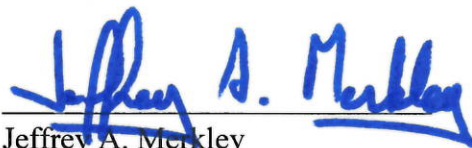
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United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



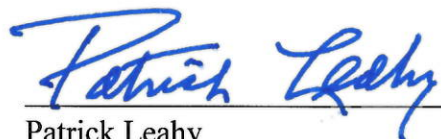
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Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator