

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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April 3, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In light of recent reports documenting the extravagant air travel of two more cabinet officials, we respectfully request that the Committee hold hearings into whether the Trump Administration has adequate controls in place to protect taxpayer money when it comes to the travel of members of this Administration.

On March 16, 2018, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington disclosed documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act showing that Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin took eight trips on military aircraft between spring and fall 2017 that totaled nearly \$1 million at taxpayer expense.¹ Half of these trips were to domestic locations, including one trip to Miami that cost more than \$40,000.

On March 20, 2018, another press account reported that EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's flight to Italy to attend a G-7 summit cost taxpayers more than \$120,000.² That total included \$7,000 for a first-class ticket for Administrator Pruitt between New York City and Rome, an extra \$30,000 to fly his 24-hour security detail with him, and \$36,000 for a military aircraft to fly Administrator Pruitt from a press event to New York City. This trip was only one of many first-class flights Administrator Pruitt took across the country and around the world, reportedly costing taxpayers more than \$100,000 for just his seats.³

These latest examples are in addition to previous reports of questionable and expensive travel at the taxpayer expense, including:

¹ *The Travels of Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin*, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (online at www.citizensforethics.org/travels-treasury-secretary-steven-mnuchin/).

² *EPA Head's Italy Work Trip Cost Taxpayers \$120,000*, CBS News (Mar. 20, 2018) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/epa-heads-italy-work-trip-cost-taxpayers-120000/).

³ *Pruitt Spent Over \$105,000 on First-Class Flights*, Politico (Mar. 20, 2018) (online at www.politico.com/story/2018/03/20/pruitt-epa-first-class-flights-430700).

- (1) a September 2017 *Politico* report that former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price's travel between May and September 2017 totaled more than \$1 million at taxpayer expense, including multiple private chartered flights;⁴
- (2) a September 2017 *Washington Post* report concerning Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's use of chartered aircraft at taxpayer expense, including a \$12,000 flight from Las Vegas to Montana on a private plane owned by oil and gas executives;⁵ and
- (3) a February 2018 *Washington Post* report concerning Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin's use of taxpayer funded airfare and reimbursed expenses to take his wife sightseeing in Europe.⁶

On September 26, 2017, you and Ranking Member Cummings launched an investigation into improper air travel by Trump Administration officials, sending letters to 25 agencies seeking a wide range of documents, including "the aircraft manifest (including all passenger names), destinations, dates of use, purpose, cost of each trip, and the source of payment for the trip."⁷ On October 17, 2017, you and Ranking Member Cummings sent follow-up letters to obtain the documents the Committee had not yet received.⁸

Despite these attempts, our Committee still has yet to receive all of the documents you and Ranking Member Cummings requested. For example, the White House has openly refused to provide any documents in response to these requests, despite the fact that Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway traveled on some of the same charter flights with Secretary Price that led to his dismissal and refunding some of these funds to the American taxpayers.

In response to the Committee's multiple requests, the White House has issued a series of evolving and bizarre refusals. First, on October 10, 2017, White House Director of Legislative Affairs Marc T. Short sent a letter declining to produce any documents and claiming that "not all

⁴ *Price Took Military Jets to Europe, Asia for Over \$500K*, *Politico* (Sept. 28, 2017) (online at www.politico.com/story/2017/09/28/tom-price-military-jets-europe-asia-hhs-243276).

⁵ *Zinke Took \$12,000 Charter Flight Home in Oil Executive's Plane, Documents Show*, *Washington Post* (Sept. 28, 2017) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2017/09/28/59533ed8-a4b8-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa_story.html).

⁶ *Veterans Affairs Chief Shulkin, Staff Misled Ethics Officials About European Trip, Report Finds*, *Washington Post* (Feb. 14, 2018) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/veterans-affairs-chief-shulkin-staff-misled-ethics-officials-about-european-trip-report-finds/2018/02/14/f7fbc020-0c3a-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html).

⁷ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Chairman Trey Gowdy and Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, The White House (Sept. 26, 2017) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-09-26-TG-EEC-to-Kelly-WH-Travel-due-10-10.pdf>).

⁸ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Chairman Trey Gowdy and Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, The White House (Oct. 17, 2017) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2017-10-17.Gowdy%20EEC%20to%20Kelly-WH%20re%20Travel%20Followup%20due%2010-31.pdf>).

components within the EOP are under the supervision of the President's Chief of Staff."⁹ Second, on November 3, 2017, Mr. Short sent another letter declining to provide any documents and directing the Committee's inquiry to the National Archives and Records Administration.¹⁰ Finally, on December 4, 2017, Mr. Short sent another letter declining to provide any documents and instead directing the Committee to obtain them from other components of the Executive Office of the President that "are subject to the requirements of the Federal Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act."¹¹

On two separate occasions, Ranking Member Cummings sent letters requesting that you issue a subpoena to compel the White House to produce all of the requested documents.¹² You refused to issue a subpoena or permit the full Committee to vote on a subpoena for those documents.

Many agencies—including the White House—have refused to provide the information our Committee has requested to conduct our investigation, and without subpoenas, we cannot effectively investigate this matter. We request that you hold a hearing on the extent of these improper flights and why the White House and several agencies have refused to provide the requested documents.

As representatives of the American taxpayers, we are responsible for ensuring that their hard-earned money is not wasted. The extensive use of noncommercial aircraft by multiple members of the Trump Administration is disrespectful to the American taxpayers who foot the bill for these expenses. It is unacceptable that the White House and several agencies have refused to provide our Committee with the documents we need to conduct our oversight responsibilities.

We thank you for consideration of our request.

⁹ Letter from Director of Legislative Affairs Marc T. Short, The White House, to Chairman Trey Gowdy and Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Oct. 10, 2017) (online at https://democratoversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/WH%20to%20OGR%2010-10-17_0.pdf).

¹⁰ Letter from Director of Legislative Affairs Marc T. Short, The White House, to Chairman Trey Gowdy and Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Nov. 3, 2017) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/WH%20to%20OGR%2011-03-17.pdf>).

¹¹ Letter from Director of Legislative Affairs Marc T. Short, The White House, to Chairman Trey Gowdy and Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Dec. 4, 2017) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/WH%20to%20OGR%2012-04-17.pdf>).

¹² Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, to Chairman Trey Gowdy, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Nov. 1, 2017) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2017-11-1.EEC%20to%20Gowdy%20re.Travel.pdf>); Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, to Chairman Trey Gowdy, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (Mar. 13, 2018) (online at <https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2018-03-13.EEC%20to%20Gowdy%20re.WH%20Travel.pdf>).

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care,
Benefits, and Administrative Rules

cc: The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman,
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Jim Jordan, Chairman
Subcommittee on Health Care, Benefits, and Administrative Rules