

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2018

Mike Flynn
Acting Deputy Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Flynn:

We write with concern that senior Trump Administration officials continue to waste taxpayer money on extravagant and unnecessary travel. Recently, the *Washington Post* exposed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt's unusual travel expenses, including the regular purchase of first-class airfare when more cost-effective options were readily available. The *Washington Post* report documents frequent and costly taxpayer-funded first-class travel, including a series of trips totaling nearly \$90,000 in June 2017 alone.¹ The Administrator is reported to have obtained a so-called "blanket waiver" that permits him to travel in first or business class when conducting official business, even though federal regulations appear to require these determinations be made on a trip-by-trip basis.² These reports also indicate that EPA staff traveling with Administrator Pruitt may have failed to comply with regulations that generally require executive branch employees to travel on flights at less expensive, pre-negotiated rates, known as city-pair fares.

These reports are the latest in a number of instances involving Administrator Pruitt's abuse of tax dollars for expensive travel, which are the subject of an ongoing investigation by the EPA Office of Inspector General. Although EPA officials have said that the agency seeks "the most cost-efficient travel options at all times," Administrator Pruitt's frequent travel to and from his home state of Oklahoma, expensive international travel that is inconsistent with EPA's mission, and previous use of military aircraft to conduct official business suggests a pattern of wasteful spending that merits heightened scrutiny. We are alarmed that taxpayers are funding these considerable expenses, which demonstrate a clear disregard for the executive branch's responsibility to use tax dollars efficiently.

¹ *First-class travel distinguishes Scott Pruitt's EPA tenure*, The Washington Post (Feb. 11, 2018) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/first-class-travel-distinguishes-scott-pruitts-epa-tenure/2018/02/11/5bb89afc-0b7d-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html?utm_term=.24d38128ec67)

² *EPA's Scott Pruitt got waiver to fly business class on foreign carrier from Italy to U.S.*, CBS News (Feb. 13, 2018) (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/epas-scott-pruitt-got-waiver-to-fly-business-class-on-non-u-s-carrier-from-italy-to-u-s/>)

The Federal Travel Regulation generally requires government employees to travel coach when conducting official business and outlines the specific circumstances in which agencies may authorize other than coach-class travel.³ Federal agencies must also submit specific exception codes to justify the use of first- or business-class air travel when reporting this information to the General Services Administration (GSA). Exceptions that permit the purchase of first- or business-class fares include situations when no coach-class accommodations are reasonably available, special needs, exceptional security circumstances, or agency mission requirements.⁴

According to EPA records, first- or business-class travel has routinely been authorized for Administrator Pruitt during his tenure due to “exceptional security circumstances,” and the Administrator has traveled first-class to such destinations as Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and Little Rock, as well as on a multi-destination trip to Colorado, Iowa, North Dakota, and Texas that incurred almost \$11,000 in first-class fare costs.⁵ In other instances, however, these same EPA records show that the Administrator traveled coach to conduct official business on numerous occasions in 2017.

In order for Congress to better understand EPA’s compliance with federal statutes and regulations when authorizing Administrator Pruitt’s travel activities, as well as the rate at which the Administrator has spent taxpayer dollars on official travel, we respectfully ask for answers to the following questions as soon as possible and no later than March 9, 2018:

1. Please provide a description of how EPA determines there to be “exceptional security circumstances” that justify the use of other than coach-class accommodations, defined by GSA as being circumstances in which “use of coach-class accommodations would endanger your life or government property.”
2. By what process did the EPA authorize a so-called “blanket waiver” for Administrator Pruitt to travel by default in first or business class, and how does any sort of blanket authorization comply with the Federal Travel Regulation?
 - a. Is there a process to periodically review and reauthorize this “blanket waiver” for Administrator Pruitt’s travel? If so, please provide an explanation of this process.

³ Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) § 301-10.123.

⁴ FTR § 301-10.123.

⁵ *EPA inspector general now investigating Pruitt’s use of military, private flights*, The Washington Post (Oct. 6, 2017) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/10/06/epa-inspector-general-expands-investigation-of-pruitts-use-of-military-private-flights/?utm_term=.bedfa224d9d9).

3. Please provide the total number of trips for which other than coach-class travel has been authorized for Administrator Pruitt, the itinerary for each trip, and the GSA-required travel exception codes (e.g., F3, B2, etc.) that were submitted for each of those trips.⁶
4. Agency records show that Administrator Pruitt flew coach several times on official travel between March and May 2017. Please explain why coach-class travel was determined to have been appropriate in these cases and why the “exceptional security circumstances” exception was not used.
5. If the Administrator is authorized to travel on other than coach-class accommodations, to what extent does the EPA authorize other than coach-class travel for accompanying agency staff?
6. To what extent are Administrator Pruitt’s flights and those of his accompanying staff arranged using the GSA City Pair Program?
7. If the Administrator is authorized to travel for official business on a non-contract city-pair flight, to what extent does the EPA authorize travel for accompanying agency staff on the same flight when a less expensive city-pair flight is otherwise available?
 - a. On June 5, 2017, agency records show that Administrator Pruitt flew first-class from Washington, DC to New York City at a round-trip cost of \$1,641, accompanied by at least two EPA employees. Please confirm whether these flights were the approved contract city-pair flights for that route. If not, please provide an explanation of why the non-contract city-pair flights were authorized.⁷
 - b. On July 6, 2017, agency records show that the Administrator flew from Washington, DC to Birmingham, AL at a round-trip cost of \$2,544. Please confirm whether any other EPA employees accompanied the Administrator on these flights and whether these flights were the approved city-pair flights for that route. If not, please provide an explanation of why the non-contract city-pair flights were authorized.⁸

⁶ General Services Administration, “Travel Exception Codes and Frequently Asked Questions” (<https://www.gsa.gov/policy-regulations/policy/travel-management-policy/travel-reporting/premium-class-travel-reports/travel-exception-codes-and-frequently-asked-questions>) (accessed Feb. 13, 2018).

⁷ *Scott Pruitt’s expenses for New York City media tour*, The Washington Post (Feb. 11, 2018) (<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/scott-pruitts-expenses-for-new-york-city-media-tour/2759/>).

⁸ *Scott Pruitt’s July trip to Birmingham*, The Washington Post (Feb. 11, 2018) (<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/scott-pruitts-july-trip-to-birmingham/2762/>).

- c. Please provide any and all travel records for any trips authorized by the EPA in which EPA employees accompanied Administrator Pruitt on non-contract city-pair flights.

Thank you for your efforts to ensure that the EPA is acting as a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars and complying with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations regarding the approval of official travel. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight
and Emergency Management
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs



Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works