

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2018

The Honorable Emily W. Murphy  
Administrator  
General Services Administration  
1800 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Ms. Murphy:

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *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](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))

<sup>2</sup> *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/>)

As the agency responsible for drafting and communicating the federal travel regulations across the executive branch, the General Services Administration (GSA) plays an essential role in ensuring that Administrator Pruitt and all federal employees use taxpayer dollars responsibly. These reports detailing Administrator Pruitt's travel raise concerns about whether the EPA is complying with regulations that require government travelers to "exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business when making official travel arrangements."<sup>3</sup>

In the interest of safeguarding taxpayer funds, the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) generally requires the use of government city-pair fares to conduct official business and provides guidance on the specific, narrow circumstances in which agencies may authorize first or business class travel.<sup>4</sup> In order to determine EPA's compliance with these policies and regulations when planning and authorizing the travel activities of Administrator Pruitt and his staff, please provide answers to the following questions as soon as possible and no later than March 9, 2018:

1. Although EPA documents show that Administrator Pruitt flew coach on several occasions between March and May 2017, in other instances, other than coach-class travel for the Administrator was authorized due to "exceptional security circumstances."<sup>5</sup> To what extent are agencies required to document or explain the specific nature of the security concern that justifies the other than coach-class fare?
2. As the agency responsible for promulgating the federal travel regulations, under what circumstances does GSA consider the issuance of a so-called "blanket waiver" that authorizes a traveler to travel in first or business class by default, as Administrator Pruitt has supposedly received, to be compliant with these regulations? Does GSA expect determinations about other than coach-class travel to be made on a case-by-case basis?
3. Pursuant to the FTR, agencies are required to report annually to GSA on each instance of other than coach-class travel authorized and paid for by the agency. Agencies must submit this information to GSA in full no later than 60 days after the end of each fiscal year, which includes, among other data points, the specific reason other than coach-class travel was authorized and the cost of the comparable coach class fare.<sup>6</sup> Please confirm that EPA submitted this information to GSA for Fiscal Year 2017 in full and on time. If not, please provide EPA's explanation for any delay in submission or omission of information.

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) §301-10.123.

<sup>4</sup> FTR § 301-10.106-107, 123.

<sup>5</sup> FTR §301-10.123.

<sup>6</sup> FTR § 300-70.101-102.

- a. Please provide a complete copy of EPA's reported information on the use of other than coach-class transportation accommodations for Fiscal Year 2017.
4. In order to reduce costs, the FTR generally requires federal employees to use contract city-pair airfares to conduct official travel.<sup>7</sup> Exceptions to this policy are limited to certain exigent circumstances when the use of city-pair fares would incur otherwise excessive expenses.
- a. What obligations do federal agencies have to justify and report travel on non city-pair flights?
  - b. Should a senior agency official elect to travel using a non city-pair flight, under what circumstances would it be appropriate for accompanying agency staff to travel on the same flight where a less expensive city-pair flight is otherwise available?

We appreciate GSA's role as an effective partner in overseeing executive branch travel expenditures. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we 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

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<sup>7</sup> FTR § 301-70.106.