

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

October 5, 2017

Arthur Elkins, Jr.  
Inspector General  
Office of Inspector General  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Elkins:

We write to request that you investigate alleged waste, fraud, and abuse at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) related to the installation of a “privacy booth” in Administrator Pruitt’s office. The reported installation of this equipment is unprecedented and may represent yet another example of bureaucratic malfeasance by the Trump Administration.

The *Washington Post* recently reported that EPA “is spending nearly \$25,000 to construct a secure, soundproof communications booth in the office of Administrator Scott Pruitt, according to government contracting records.”<sup>1</sup> EPA has described the equipment as a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) and reportedly customized the private communications booth, which cost several times more than a typical model.<sup>2</sup> According to the vendor, EPA’s reported primary objective was “essentially a secure phone booth that couldn’t be breached from a data point of view or from someone standing outside eavesdropping.”<sup>3</sup> However, EPA headquarters reportedly already has a SCIF on another floor of the building.<sup>4</sup> The installation of a dedicated communications booth in the Administrator’s office raises questions regarding why such equipment is needed and what types of conversations Administrator Pruitt is having that would warrant a private soundproof booth.

Additionally, earlier this year the Agency reportedly instituted extreme restrictions at EPA headquarters, including prohibiting employees from carrying cell phones and taking notes

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<sup>1</sup> *EPA Spending almost \$25,000 to Install a Secure Phone Booth for Scott Pruitt*, The Washington Post (Sept. 26, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

in meetings with Administrator Pruitt, restricting movement within the building, and requiring escorts.<sup>5</sup> If misused, and this facility is in fact a private communications booth, then this action would represent the latest action in a troubling pattern of secrecy and distrust at the EPA under Administrator Pruitt's leadership.

The Committee has a longstanding interest in ensuring effective Agency controls regarding unnecessary EPA purchases and reducing the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse. Therefore, we ask that you conduct a review that addresses whether EPA's applicable policies and procedures are now sufficiently designed to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse, and whether the purchase of a soundproof communications booth for Administrator Pruitt's office was in compliance with all applicable policies and procedures. We request that your review include a determination of the following:

- 1) Is the new privacy booth a SCIF and, if so, what justification was provided for this additional facility in the office of Administrator Pruitt, given that EPA headquarters already has a SCIF on another floor?<sup>6</sup>
- 2) If this facility is a formal SCIF, what policies and procedures are in place to ensure it will be used solely for official communications that require the use of such a facility? Is the Agency effectively implementing all applicable existing policies and procedures with respect to this facility?
- 3) Were all applicable Agency purchasing and contracting policies and procedures, including applicable ethics reviews, correctly followed for the purchase and installation of all equipment and items ordered or installed to date in Administrator Pruitt's office, including this facility? Is the framework effective, and how could the framework be improved?
- 4) What Agency officials reviewed and approved the purchase of this facility?
- 5) What has been the total cost of installations, modifications, facilities, and equipment installed and/or purchased for Administrator Pruitt's office since January 2017 to present?
- 6) Are EPA policies and procedures sufficiently designed to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in purchases by the Office of the Administrator, including purchases made by and for Administrator Pruitt and his immediate staff? How can EPA strengthen its policies, procedures, and oversight controls with respect to purchases made by and for Administrator Pruitt and his immediate staff in order to prevent excessive or ineligible purchases and waste, fraud, and abuse?

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<sup>5</sup> *Scott Pruitt is Carrying out His E.P.A. Agenda in Secret, Critics Say*, The New York Times (Aug. 11, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See note 1.

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Americans deserve an EPA Administrator who devotes Agency resources to protecting human health and the environment, and they have a right to know if Administrator Pruitt is wasting taxpayer money on duplicative and unnecessary purchases for his office. We appreciate your prompt and thorough review of these issues. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jon Monger of the Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.


Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations



Paul D. Tonko  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Environment

Cc: The Honorable Greg Walden  
The Honorable Tim Murphy  
The Honorable John Shimkus