

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

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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February 14, 2018

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 today to confirm that you are reviewing Administrator Pruitt's "blanket waiver" from federal standards that limit government employees from purchasing first-class travel as part of your ongoing audit of the Administrator travel.

Recent reports by *The Washington Post* further detail Administrator Pruitt's secretive, expensive, and frequent travel practices, including extensive domestic first-class travel and stays at luxury hotels.¹ According to the *Post*, taxpayer-funded travel for Mr. Pruitt and aides for one period during June 2017 cost at least \$90,000, including a first-class seat for Mr. Pruitt on a short flight from Washington, D.C. to New York City that cost more than six times the price of an economy ticket on the same flight.² On at least four occasions, Mr. Pruitt reportedly spent between \$2,000 and \$2,600 on first-class airfare for events near his home in Tulsa, Oklahoma where Mr. Pruitt often stays for the weekend before returning to Washington.³ Administrator Pruitt apparently also flew first-class to Boston⁴ earlier this week, the day after the Trump Administration proposed cutting the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) overall budget

¹ First-class travel distinguishes Scott Pruitt's EPA tenure, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2018) and 'I'm not involved in any of those decisions,' EPA's Pruitt says of extensive first-class travel, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 13, 2018).

² First-class travel distinguishes Scott Pruitt's EPA tenure, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2018).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Playbook Power Briefing, *Politico* (Feb. 13, 2018).

by more than 23 percent, reducing agency staffing levels to record lows and slashing funding for critical public health programs for clean air, chemical safety, and geographic programs.⁵

Administrator Pruitt's many first-class flights around the country at taxpayers' expense raise renewed concerns of secrecy and waste at the Trump EPA. Agency personnel have indicated Mr. Pruitt has a "blanket waiver" from federal standards that limit the purchase of first-class tickets, citing security concerns.⁶ Although the Administrator ostensibly runs the EPA, Mr. Pruitt himself has stated he is "not involved in any of those decisions" about travel arrangements, indicating "[t]hose are all made by the [security] detail, the security assessment in addition to the chief of staff."⁷ It is unclear how, in each of these instances, more costly domestic travel, or where one is seated on an aircraft, provides additional security as compared to more economical options.

Our Committee has a longstanding interest in reducing the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse and ensuring effective Agency controls regarding leadership and staff travel, and that is why we are pleased that you are conducting this extensive review. In light of these recent reports, we would expect that your ongoing review would determine whether Administrator Pruitt's "blanket waiver" for premium-class travel is in compliance with all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures. We would anticipate that your review would include a determination of the following:

1. On how many occasions to date did Administrator Pruitt travel domestically in first or business-class, and what was the total expense of these tickets?
2. To what extent were all applicable travel regulations and Agency travel policies appropriately followed for the issuance of a "blanket waiver" for Administrator Pruitt's premium travel? What is the date of issue for the "blanket waiver"?
3. Which EPA political appointees and career staff were involved in the development, drafting, or review of a "blanket waiver" for Administrator Pruitt's premium travel?
4. How does EPA's purchase of premium-class airfare provide enhanced security as compared to economy-class airfare? Has the Agency conducted any analysis of to indicate enhanced security in first or business-class as compared to economy class? Is first-class safer than business-class? Is business-class safer than economy or coach? Are some places in coach safer than other places in coach? If so, how does this analysis support the Agency's issuance of a "blanket waiver" for Administrator Pruitt's premium travel?

⁵ Trump budget seeks 23 percent cut at EPA, eliminating dozens of programs, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 12, 2018) and Environmental Protection Agency, *FY2019 EPA Budget in Brief* (Feb. 2019).

⁶ The Energy 202, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 14, 2018).

⁷ *Id.*

5. For each instance where Administrator Pruitt traveled in first or business-class, how many other premium class tickets were purchased for any accompanying aides, staff, or security detail, and what was the total cost of these tickets?
6. Have any other current EPA political appointees received waivers from federal regulations in order to authorize domestic first or business-class travel? If so, were these waivers for individual trips or “blanket waivers”? Do all waivers appropriately comply with all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures?

American taxpayers deserve assurances that their tax dollars are not wasted by the government’s highest officials. We appreciate your prompt and thorough review of these issues.

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, Chairman
The Honorable Gregg Harper, Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
The Honorable John Shimkus, Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment