

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

February 20, 2018

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write to request information regarding waivers you have received from federal standards that limit government employees from purchasing first-class travel. To date, your Agency has failed to provide a clear explanation as to whether your travel since becoming Administrator complies with all applicable federal regulations and Agency procedures.

Recent reports by *The Washington Post* detail secretive and expensive travel practices, including extensive domestic first-class travel and stays at luxury hotels.¹ Last week, you reportedly flew first-class to Boston², just one day after the Trump Administration proposed cutting the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) overall budget by more than 23 percent, reducing Agency staffing levels to record lows and slashing funding for geographic programs and critical public health programs for clean air and chemical safety.³

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

³ 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).

Americans deserve an EPA Administrator more dedicated to first-class protection of human health and the environment than to luxury travel at taxpayer expense. You have stated that you are “not involved in any of those decisions” about travel and “[t]hose are all made by the [security] detail, the security assessment in addition to the chief of staff.”⁴ However, according to a statement by EPA’s Office of Inspector General, no security threats have been related to air travel.⁵

Additionally, it remains unclear how any possible security threats warranted the frequent issuance of waivers authorizing you to fly first-class on domestic flights, or how sitting in a first-class seat is safer than sitting in economy class. According to Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger III, the retired pilot who once landed a damaged commercial aircraft in the Hudson River and who now serves as a safety and aviation expert at CBS news, “[f]irst-class is not safer than economy.”⁶

While the Agency has stated that you were reportedly “approached in the airport numerous times, to the point of profanities being yelled at him and so forth,”⁷ this rationale fails to explain how exchanges at the airport necessitate purchasing first-class seats for the flight itself. This rationale also seemingly contradicts EPA’s previous travel justifications as instances where you are “hearing directly from people affected” by EPA.⁸

The Agency has similarly offered shifting explanations to date regarding whether or not you have complied with all applicable federal regulations and Agency policies and procedures, raising serious questions about the veracity of the information provided by your office. Specifically, last Tuesday, an Agency spokesperson indicated you had been issued a “blanket waiver” from federal standards that limit government employees from purchasing first-class travel.⁹ However, pursuant to federal travel regulations, “blanket authorizations of other than coach-class transportation accommodations is prohibited and shall be authorized on an individual trip-by-trip basis, unless the traveler has an up-to-date documented disability or special need.”¹⁰ Last Wednesday, your staff retracted the claim that you had a “blanket waiver,” and instead

⁴ The Energy 202, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 14, 2018).

⁵ No threats against Pruitt related to air travel, agency says, *Politico* (Feb. 15, 2018).

⁶ The Energy 202, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 15, 2018).

⁷ Pruitt’s security threat? A passenger shouting, ‘You’re f---ing up the environment,’ *Politico* (Feb. 15, 2018).

⁸ First-class travel distinguishes Scott Pruitt’s EPA tenure, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2018).’

⁹ EPA changes its story on Pruitt’s first-class travel, *Politico* (Feb. 14, 2018).

¹⁰ General Services Administration, *Federal Travel Regulation, Amendment 2010-07*, Note 2 to § 301-10.123 (Nov. 29, 2010).

stated that “for every trip, Administrator Pruitt submits a waiver to fly in either first or business class.”¹¹

Given EPA’s apparent confusion regarding possible waivers from federal travel regulations, we request a response to the following by no later than March 6, 2018:

1. Please provide a list of all instances to date where you traveled by air domestically in first or business-class, including 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 any waivers for your premium travel?
 - a. Have you, as alleged by your spokesperson, submitted a waiver to fly in either first or business-class for every trip taken as EPA Administrator?
 - b. Have you requested or received waivers for first-class tickets on other modes of transport, in addition to airplane travel? For example, have you requested or received waivers for first or business-class train travel?
3. Has the Agency conducted any analysis to indicate enhanced security is achieved by premium travel?
 - a. Do certain flights or travel itineraries present a greater security risk than others, in EPA’s estimation?
 - b. How do interactions with the American public at airports necessitate you purchasing first-class plane tickets?
 - c. Has this analysis concluded EPA’s purchase of premium-class airfare provides enhanced security as compared to economy-class airfare?
 - d. Has the Agency completed any comparative analysis of security risks associated with different modes of transport? For example, has EPA analysis identified unique risks associated with train travel and your location on a train? If so, how do these security risks compare to those of air travel?
4. Which EPA political appointees and career staff were involved in requesting, developing, drafting, or reviewing any waivers issued for your premium travel? Please provide the name, title, and office of these individuals.
5. For each instance where you traveled in first or business-class, how many other premium class tickets were purchased for any accompanying aides, staff, or security detail? What was the total cost of those tickets?

¹¹ EPA changes its story on Pruitt’s first-class travel, *Politico* (Feb. 14, 2018).

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?
7. Was any of your first-class or business-class travel authorized or otherwise approved by the White House? Has the White House provided you any guidance or instructions regarding the purchase of first-class or business-class tickets?

Thank you for your prompt and thorough attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please feel free 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, Chairman
The Honorable Gregg Harper, Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
The Honorable John Shimkus, Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment