

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
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July 28, 2017

The Honorable Arthur A. Elkins, Jr.
Inspector General
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Elkins:

We are writing today to request that you conduct a review of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adherence to policies and procedures for Administrator travel and whether EPA's applicable oversight controls are sufficient to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. This request follows numerous troubling reports that Administrator Scott Pruitt frequently traveled to and from his home state of Oklahoma at the taxpayers' expense.¹

Administrator Pruitt reportedly traveled to Oklahoma for 43 days,² or nearly half of all days during March, April, and May of 2017.³ According to reports, his travel, which included both weekend trips to his home and official business in the state,⁴ cost more than \$15,000, and frequently occurred at the taxpayers' expense.⁵ For example, reports indicate EPA paid \$1,980 for just one of Administrator Pruitt's commercial airline tickets.⁶ Agency records indicate Administrator Pruitt attended "informational meetings" while in Oklahoma, although news

¹ *Scott Pruitt spent much of early months at EPA traveling home, report says*, New York Times (July 24, 2017).

² *Pruitt spent significant time in Oklahoma in spring, records show*, Politico (July 24, 2017).

³ *EPA chief taps taxpayer dollars for weekend flights home*, Washington Post (July 25, 2017).

⁴ See note 2.

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ *Records: EPA chief jets away for weekends on taxpayer's dime*, New England Cable News (July 24, 2017).

reports noted “[t]hough a trip to Oklahoma might last three or five days, it was not unusual for only one such meeting to be listed during Pruitt’s time away from Washington.”⁷

The Committee has a longstanding interest in ensuring effective agency controls regarding leadership and staff travel and reducing the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse. Additionally, the Committee recognizes and appreciates previous work conducted by your office in 2015 that found weaknesses in EPA’s management controls for travel.⁸ Therefore, we ask that you conduct a review that addresses whether EPA’s applicable policies and procedures are now sufficiently designed to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse, and whether Administrator Pruitt’s travel was in compliance with all applicable policies and procedures. We request that your review include a determination of the following:

1. Were all applicable agency travel policies and procedures, including applicable ethics reviews, correctly followed for all of Administrator Pruitt’s travel to and from Oklahoma to date?
2. Does the *Executive Approval Framework* (i.e., subordinate’s approval of a superior’s travel) apply to the creation and approval of travel authorizations and travel vouchers for Administrator Pruitt? Is the framework effective, and how could the framework be improved?
3. Has the Agency’s Cincinnati Finance Center, or any other EPA office, created or reviewed reports for Administrator Pruitt’s repeated travel to Oklahoma? Have any irregularities been submitted to the designated position within the Office of the Chief Financial Officer? If so, what actions were taken in response?
4. For all trips to and from Oklahoma to date, which EPA staff and security personnel travelled with or in advance of Administrator Pruitt? What was the total cost of travel for Administrator Pruitt and those individuals, and were all applicable agency ethics reviews and travel policies and procedures correctly followed?
5. According to Administrator Pruitt’s travel documents, the Heritage Foundation paid for his hotel room for a May trip to Colorado Springs.⁹ In what instances can non-governmental organizations pay for Administrator Pruitt’s travel expenses, including, but not limited to, airline tickets and hotel accommodations? To what extent did this occur? When this occurred, were all applicable travel procedures and ethics reviews correctly followed?

⁷ *Id.*

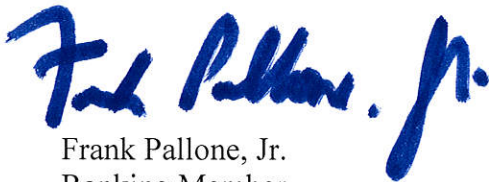
⁸ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Inspector General, *EPA Needs Better Management Controls for Approval of Employee Travel* (Sept. 22, 2015) (15-P-0294).

⁹ Environmental Integrity Project, *Scott Pruitt Travel Vouchers* (July 2015) (www.environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FOIA-Pruitt-Travel-Vouchers.pdf).

6. When EPA purchased premium class travel for Administrator Pruitt, were all necessary procedures followed and justifications provided?
7. Are EPA's policies and procedures sufficiently designed to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse in agency travel? How can EPA strengthen its policies, procedures, and oversight controls with respect to Administrator travel to prevent excessive trips, ineligible travel costs, and fraud, waste, and abuse?

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 inappropriately making taxpayers foot the bill for his trips to Oklahoma. 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 minority 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