

United States Senate

October 27, 2016

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

I am writing to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate travel by federal officials within the executive branch.

According to the U.S. Code, "The travel of an employee shall be by the most expeditious means of transportation practicable and shall be commensurate with the nature and purpose of the duties of the employee requiring such travel."¹

Unfortunately, it does not appear that agency heads are living up to the standards set by this statute. This fall, reports emerged that then-Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price took numerous trips on private planes this year. According to some estimates, Secretary Price's 26 trips on private jets cost taxpayers over \$400,000.²

Troubling reports have also surfaced regarding the travel of other agency heads. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General is currently reviewing whether EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's trips to his home state violated EPA travel regulations.³ Similar concerns have been raised regarding the travel of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.⁴

I respectfully request that the GAO answer the following questions:

- 1) Are agency heads, political appointees, and career officials within the executive branch traveling in a cost-effective manner?
- 2) Are the rules and procedures regarding the travel of agency heads, political appointees, and career officials effective in upholding 5 U.S.C. § 5733 and ensuring that the executive branch officials travel in a cost-effective manner? Are these regulations consistent across agencies within the executive branch?

¹ 5 U.S.C. § 5733

² Dan Diamond, "Tom Price to halt taxpayer-funded travel on private jets," Politico, September 23, 2017.

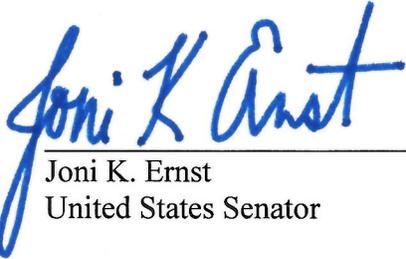
³ Brady Dennis and Juliet Eilperin, "EPA's Pruitt took charter, military flights that cost taxpayers more than \$58,000," Washington Post, September 27, 2017.

⁴ Rene Marsh and Gregory Wallace, "Zinke's travel continues to raise ethical questions," CNN, October 12, 2017.

I also request that the GAO's report include recommendations for actions that can be taken by Congress and the executive branch to ensure that travel by federal officials is done in a cost-effective manner, and that the regulations governing executive branch officials are effective and consistent across the executive branch.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Tyler Brown in my office at (202) 224-3254.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator