

March 9, 2018

To: The Honorable Scott Pruitt
CC: Justina Fugh, Senior Counsel for Ethics
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of the Administrator, 1101A
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Administrator Pruitt:

On February 11, the Washington Post reported on your travel arrangements, including several first-class flights paid for by U.S. taxpayers. Since then, a stream of revelations regarding your domestic and international travel arrangements have raised questions about the proper use of taxpayer funds in support of your extensive and expensive trips. In light of these reports, and following up on Congressional inquiries as well as Inspector General and Government Accountability Office investigations, we write to urge you to reimburse American taxpayers for any and all first class, business class or private aircraft travel you've made since becoming EPA administrator in February 2017. In addition, we request an accounting of travel expenses by your security and political entourage. If any of them incurred charter or first class/business expenses on account of traveling with you, these expenses should be reimbursed to taxpayers as well.

In June of 2017, you and several staff embarked on a trip to Italy for a meeting of the G7 environmental ministers. The first leg of your flight required a military aircraft to get your entourage to New York City. While in Italy, you found time for pasta cooking classes and private tours of the Vatican before cutting your trip short—after spending just the first few hours at the two-day G7 meeting—to return to Washington for a Cabinet meeting. At that meeting, you claimed that the administration's new climate policy—leaving the Paris climate agreement—was “well-received” by the ministers you snubbed. The decision to return to the U.S. early required a business fare ticket on one of the world's most exclusive and luxurious airlines, driving the total cost for the trip to over \$40,000.

According to information obtained only by public records request, and not voluntarily disclosed by your office, in the first seven months of your tenure at EPA alone, your private, first class and business class air fare totaled more than \$100,000. Additionally, these records show you spent more than \$14,000 on charter flights within Oklahoma on a single day in July of 2017.

You initially claimed the EPA ethics office provided a “blanket waiver” for your Italy trip and other first-class flights due to unspecified security concerns. But Republicans, Democrats, security experts, and your agency's own Inspector General have all debunked that excuse. After several misleading explanations, your office conceded that flying first

class was necessary to avoid hearing direct feedback from fellow traveling Americans about your attempts to undermine public health and the environment.

This wasteful spending and your intense focus on insulating yourself from the American public raises serious concerns about transparency and stewardship of taxpayer resources. Others in the Trump Administration have been held accountable for misuse of taxpayer funds for travel. Former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price was forced to refund taxpayers for his extravagant and unethical travel expenditures, and ultimately resigned after the extent of his abuse was uncovered. Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin was forced to reimburse taxpayers \$4,000 for personal travel paid for on the taxpayers' dime— an amount far less than you spent just on your Italian trip.

This misuse of taxpayer funds is egregious. POLITICO has coined the “Pruitt test” - a public accountability benchmark to determine if a Trump Administration official's travel unnecessarily wastes taxpayer funds. In just one example contrasting your behavior, OMB Director Mick Mulvaney, your peer, passed that test by flying coach overseas. That same week, media reports revealed yet another first-class trip you took from Washington to Boston, a flight of approximately 45 minutes.

Our request for taxpayer reimbursement comes on the heels of a letter from House Oversight and Government Reform Chair, Republican Trey Gowdy, as well as a letter from members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to you calling for justification for your exorbitant travel expenses.

“Americans deserve an EPA administrator more dedicated to first-class protection of human health and the environment than to luxury travel at taxpayer expense,” the Energy and Commerce letter stated. “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.”

This waste of taxpayer funds is particularly tone deaf as you applaud President Trump's proposed budget cuts that would cut your own agency's funding by a third. These proposed cuts would gut staffing levels to record lows and slash funding for enforcement of existing laws, for critical state programs and for lifesaving standards for clean air and chemical safety.

Conservative columnist Tom Rogan wrote in the Washington Examiner that “President Trump should take action” regarding your waste of taxpayer funds. And the conservative Manchester Union Leader editorial page called your first-class travel habit “mismanagement” and an “extravagance.”

Americans should have full confidence that their government officials are fiscally responsible with US tax dollars and trustworthy stewards of the law. For all the reasons outlined in this letter, we believe that in order to restore the trust of the American people in the office of the EPA Administrator you must reimburse the American taxpayer for any and all unjustified travel, including travel since July 2017 for which records have yet to be made public, and for any first-class/business travel expenses for security and political staff joining you on travel. Moving forward, you must commit to being judicious about your travel and transparent with the American people about where, when and why you are traveling. And most important, all travel must be in support of the EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment.

Sincerely,

Center for American Progress
Center for Biological Diversity
Defend Our Future
Diesel Health Project (Kansas City, Kansas)
Earthjustice
Environment Ohio
Franciscan Action Network
Friends of the Earth
Green Country Sierra Club (Oklahoma)
Green Latinos
Herd on the Hill (Washington, DC)
Hip Hop Caucus
January Contreras (Candidate for Arizona Attorney General)
Latino Victory Fund
League of Conservation Voters
Mi Familia Vota
National Council of EPA Locals #238, American Federation of Government Employees
National LGBTQ Task Force
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nevada Conservation League
NextGen America
Population Connection Action Fund
Public Citizen
Sierra Club
Sierra Club (Nevada)