

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

October 3, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

A recent spike in concerns about federal officials traveling on non-commercial aircraft for official business has prompted various congressional and media inquiries. For example, yesterday, the Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Committee and the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Ranking Member requested an Inspector General investigation related to your travel expenses.¹ The request letter, based largely on various media reports,² questions, among other cases, the use of “privately chartered flights between St. Tomas [sic] and St. Croix”³ The ranking members’ letter, however, selectively avoids the Interior Department spokeswoman’s comments stating that “charter or military plane trips were booked only after officials were unable to find commercial flights that would accommodate [your] schedule and that all were ‘pre-cleared by career officials in the ethics office.’”⁴

Federal officials must use the “most expeditious means of transportation practicable commensurate with the nature and purpose of the duties of the employee requiring such travel.”⁵ Office of Management and Budget (OMB) policy further prescribes that proper use of government-owned, leased, chartered, or rented aircraft should be restricted to defined official purposes.⁶ OMB Director Mick Mulvaney reiterated this policy in a September 29, 2017 memorandum to all heads of executive departments and agencies. Director Mulvaney’s memorandum also provides notification of the additional prior approval requirement from the

¹ Letter from Raúl M. Grijalva, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, and A. Donald McEachin, Ranking Member, Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, to Mary Kendall, Dep. Inspector Gen., U.S. Dep’t of the Interior (Oct. 2, 2017) (on file with author).

² See, e.g., Ben Lefebvre, *Interior Secretary Zinke traveled on charter, military planes*, POLITICO, (Sept. 28, 2017), <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/28/ryan-zinke-charter-military-planes-interior-243280>.

³ *Supra* note 1.

⁴ *Supra* note 2.

⁵ 5 U.S.C. § 5733.

⁶ OMB Circular A-126 Revised, *Improving the Management and Use of Government Aircraft*, (May 22, 1992).

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White House Chief of Staff for “all travel on Government-owned, rented, leased, or chartered aircraft”⁷

Given these recent concerns and updates to the travel policy, the Committee seeks to better understand the guidelines and practices governing the use of non-commercial flights by the Secretary at Department of the Interior. Therefore, to assist the Committee in its oversight, please produce the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 17, 2017:

1. Documents sufficient to show all Department of the Interior policies and guidelines relating to the Secretary’s use of government-owned, rented, leased, or chartered aircraft; and
2. Documents sufficient to identify each use of a government-owned, rented, leased, or chartered aircraft by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior since January 20, 2009. Provide accompanying information sufficient to show the dates, destinations, purpose, costs, and approval by the Departmental Ethics Office in the Office of the Solicitor for all identified flights.

Please deliver your response to room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building. The Committee prefers, if possible, to receive your response in electronic format. An attachment contains additional instructions for responding to the Committee’s request.

Please contact the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-7107 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Oversight and Investigations

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable A. Donald McEachin, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

⁷ Memorandum from Mick Mulvaney, Dir., Office of Management and Budget, on Travel on Government-Owned, Rented, Leased, or Chartered Aircraft (Sept. 29, 2017), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/memoranda/2017/m-17-32.pdf>.