



July 27, 2017

The Honorable Adam Miles
Acting Special Counsel
Office of Special Counsel
1730 M Street NW
Suite 218
Washington, DC 20036-4505

Dear Mr. Miles:

American Oversight respectfully requests that the Office of Special Counsel (“OSC”) immediately open an investigation into whether EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt violated government ethics rules, wasted government funds, or abused his authority by using government resources to travel to his home state of Oklahoma for personal or political reasons.

The nonprofit group Environmental Integrity Project (EIP) recently reported its finding that Mr. Pruitt traveled to Oklahoma ten times in roughly the first three months of his tenure as the EPA Administrator.¹ In total, 43 of the 48 days on which he traveled between March and May of 2017—or ninety percent of his travel days—involved travel to Oklahoma.² EIP also reported that the airfare for Mr. Pruitt’s travel cost the taxpayers over \$12,000, not including the price of travel and lodging for his staff and security detail.³

Cabinet members—like all government employees—are prohibited from using their official positions for their personal benefit or for partisan political purposes. So, for example, government ethics rules provide that federal employees may not use their public office for their own private gain⁴ and must strive to use official time and government property only for official business.⁵ Additionally, the Hatch Act prohibits federal employees from participating in certain partisan political activities.⁶

For that reason, government officials have previously reimbursed the government for travel costs associated with their trips home when those trips were not necessary for official business or when the use of taxpayer funds was found to be improper.⁷

¹ *EPA Administrator Pruitt Spends Almost Half His Days Travelling to Oklahoma*, ENV. INTEGRITY PROJECT, July 24, 2017, <http://www.environmentalintegrity.org/news/epa-administrator-pruitt-spends-almost-half-his-days-travelling-to-oklahoma/> (“EIP Report”).

² *See id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *See* 5 C.F.R. § 2635.702.

⁵ *See* 5 C.F.R. §§ 2635.704–705.

⁶ *See* 5 U.S.C. § 7323.

⁷ *See, e.g.,* Lisa Friedman, *Scott Pruitt Spent Much of Early Months at E.P.A. Traveling Home*, *Report Says*, N.Y. TIMES, July 24, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/07/24/climate/scott->

A spokeswoman for the EPA has stated that Mr. Pruitt's travel "all serves the purpose of hearing from hard-working Americans about how E.P.A. can better serve the American people."⁸ However, it strains credulity that the official duties of the EPA Administrator required him to spend forty-three days in Oklahoma, and only five days traveling to other locales in the remaining forty-nine states of the Union. Indeed, as the EIP report noted, Mr. Pruitt often spends three to five days in Oklahoma for a trip containing only one official meeting. Moreover, the nature of those meetings—touring a chemical plant and contaminated watershed or receiving an award from an Oklahoma trade group⁹—raises questions about whether there is a legitimate reason for consistently holding purportedly official meetings in Oklahoma, or whether they have been scheduled as a pretext to facilitate Mr. Pruitt's personal time at home in Oklahoma or his political ambitions for future state office. Particularly given that Mr. Pruitt requested an unusually large 10-person security detail¹⁰—which racked up a bill of over \$200,000 for travel expenses through July 2017¹¹—the American people deserve to know whether that travel was truly necessary and, if not, to be reimbursed for the improper use of taxpayer funds.

American Oversight is a non-partisan organization dedicated to accountability and ethics in government. No doubt we share that commitment with you. Consistent with OSC's authority to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by government actors, including "[v]iolation[s] of a law, rule, or regulation," "gross waste[s] of funds," and "abuse[s] of authority," as well as enforcement of the Hatch Act,¹² we urge you to investigate Mr. Pruitt's use of government resources to travel home and, if you find a violation of the law, recommend appropriate corrective or disciplinary action.

Respectfully submitted,



Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

[pruitt-epa-travel-expenses.html](#) (noting that former EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy paid for her travel home); Manu Raju, *Lugar to Repay Hotel Expenses*, POLITICO (Mar. 21, 2012, 11:38 PM), <http://www.politico.com/story/2012/03/lugar-to-repay-home-state-hotel-expenses-074329> (Senator Richard Lugar reimbursed taxpayer money that was improperly used to pay for hotel expenses).

⁸ See EIP Report, *supra* note 1.

⁹ See *id.*; Friedman, *supra* note 7.

¹⁰ Rafi Letzter, *With Major EPA Cuts Looming, Scott Pruitt Wants a 10-Person, 24/7 Security Detail*, BUS. INSIDER (Apr. 12, 2017, 6:01 PM), <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-epa-chief-pruitt-security-guards-2017-4>.

¹¹ Kevin Bogardus, *Big Spike in Security Spending for Pruitt*, E&E NEWS, July 5, 2017, <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060056958>.

¹² *Disclosure of Wrongdoing*, OFFICE OF SPECIAL COUNSEL, <https://osc.gov/Pages/DOW.aspx> (last visited July 24, 2017).