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CO-CHAIR

September 29, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

In light of recent reports regarding your use of chartered private flights at taxpayer expense, I write to request additional information about the use of noncommercial flights by you and other officials in the Department of the Interior.

According to an article in The Washington Post, published September 28, you “took a four-hour flight from Las Vegas to Kalispell, Mont., aboard a private plane owned by the executives of a Wyoming oil-and-gas exploration firm” at a cost to taxpayers of \$12,375. The article also details private flights you took in the United States Virgin Islands in March.

Congress and the American people deserve an explanation for this extravagant use of taxpayer funds. Combined with similar reports of excessively expensive private travel by numerous senior Trump administration officials, there seems to be a disturbing pattern of limitless spending on noncommercial flights without reasonable justification.

Additionally, your decision to fly on an aircraft owned by executives of an oil and gas corporation, in a sector over which the Department of the Interior has direct leasing and regulatory authority, creates the appearance of a serious conflict of interest.

As Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, it is my responsibility to ensure that taxpayer funds are spent appropriately and responsibly as intended by Congress.

With the Trump administration proposing deep budget cuts to the Department of the Interior, Congress deserves to know how you can justify this apparent abuse of taxpayer funds. Therefore, I am requesting that you provide me with the following information no later than October 11, 2017:

- The dates, itineraries, and official purposes of all noncommercial flights you and other senior Interior officials have taken since you became Secretary of the Interior
- The cost of each of the noncommercial flights
- The official justification for the use of each noncommercial flight, instead of using commercial air travel
- The names of the ethics official(s) who approved the use of each noncommercial flight, along with all written documentation of those approvals
- The ownership entities of the aircraft for each noncommercial flight, including whether the ownership entity of the aircraft has leases, business or pending leases or business with the Department of the Interior

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress