

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 23, 2019

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write regarding the waste of taxpayer dollars by former Health and Human Services (HHS or the Department) Secretary Tom Price. Two years ago, Secretary Price resigned after press reports revealed his office's repeated and deliberate misuse of taxpayer dollars to charter expensive aircraft, including for travel he took to conduct personal business. The HHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) subsequently conducted a broad review of Secretary Price's travel, which found that his office "improperly used Federal Funds" that "resulted in waste ... totaling at least \$341,000."¹

The OIG audit recommended that HHS recoup the misspent money and take steps to ensure such waste does not occur again.² But the OIG has told our offices that 14 months after the recommendations were issued, HHS has not provided proof of any demonstrable progress toward resolving them, and that all seven recommendations remain outstanding.

According to the OIG audit, Secretary Price's office improperly chartered private and military aircraft, or otherwise failed to comply with Federal Travel Regulations for 20 of the 21 trips he took during the course of his seven-month tenure.³ In total, the flights cost taxpayers \$1.2 million, an extraordinary sum given that Secretary Price took the flights to and from cities where commercial service was readily available at far less expense. In one instance, news reports revealed that former Secretary Price "took a government-funded private jet in August to get to St. Simons Island, an exclusive Georgia resort where he and his wife own land," and in another instance he "chartered a jet to fly ... to Nashville, Tennessee, where he owns a condominium and where his son resides."⁴

¹ Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services Did Not Comply With Federal Regulations for Chartered Aircraft and Other Government Travel Related to Former Secretary Price," July 2018, <https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region12/A121700002.pdf>. [hereinafter "HHSOIG"], at 7.

² *Id.*, see Recommendations, at 27.

³ *Id.*, see Findings, at 7.

⁴ Politico, "Price's Private-Jet Travels Included Visits with Colleagues, Lunch with Son," Sep. 26, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/26/tom-price-private-jets-243176>.

The OIG found that Secretary Price's travel violated both HHS policies and procedures and Federal Travel Regulations, which require that "taxpayers should pay no more than necessary for [government officials'] transportation."⁵ The OIG determined that it would be appropriate for the Administration to recoup "(1) \$333,014 related to the authorization and use of chartered aircraft; (2) \$4,926 related to travel that started or ended in locations other than the official duty station; and (3) \$2,960 related to other excess travel costs."⁶

On June 28, 2018, HHS responded to the OIG report saying it concurred with the majority of the report's recommendations and that it would be reviewing "whether recoupment in this setting is legally appropriate."⁷ However, since the OIG's recommendations remain outstanding, it is not clear whether HHS has made any attempt to recoup the hundreds of thousands of wasted taxpayer dollars identified in the audit. Included in that total is money that Secretary Price still owes the government for overseas travel his wife, Betty Price, took at taxpayer expense without proper approvals.⁸

American taxpayers deserve full transparency and accountability for former Secretary Price's exorbitant travel habits, and they deserve to be repaid in full. Therefore, please provide answers to the following questions no later than November 6, 2019:

1. The OIG identified "at least \$341,000" in wasted travel funds that HHS should recoup for taxpayers. How much of that amount has HHS recouped, and from whom? For the remaining funds, please explain why HHS has not recouped them.
2. Has Secretary Price repaid HHS for the remaining balance the OIG identified for overseas travel taken by his wife?
3. In June 2018, HHS committed to conducting a legal analysis to determine from whom it should recoup wasted funds in relation to travel approved by Secretary Price's office. Please provide us with this analysis. If the analysis is not complete, please explain why not and clarify when HHS expects it to be completed.
4. The OIG has indicated to our offices that HHS has not provided an update on the OIG's non-monetary recommendations since the audit was issued in July 2018, and as such, all these recommendations remain outstanding. When will HHS address the OIG's non-monetary recommendations?

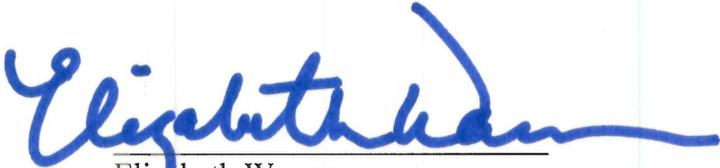
⁵ *Supra*, note 1, *HHSOIG*, at 7; 41 CFR § 310-10.260.

⁶ *Supra*, note 1, *HHSOIG*, see Report In Brief, and Recommendations, at 27.

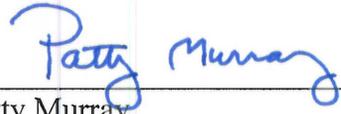
⁷ *Id.*, at 43.

⁸ *Id.*, at 15, 28.

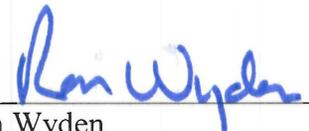
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Patty Murray
Ranking Member,
U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member,
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance