

**United States Senate**  
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

May 5, 2010

**Via Electronic Transmission**

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:





As the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance (Finance Committee) I have a duty to conduct oversight of the executive branch, including the activities of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/Department). This duty includes monitoring HHS activities and conducting oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used appropriately.

Last month I wrote to you regarding the increasing costs of international travel by HHS employees between Fiscal Years (FY) 2007 and 2008 and requesting specific information regarding the Department's travel costs for FY 2009. This month, I write regarding new information that has recently come to light regarding travel practices at the Department. A former HHS travel official brought this information to my attention out of concern over wasteful spending and decreased accountability within the Department. To better understand what is happening at the Department, I am providing you the following examples of these allegations and invite your response:

- The Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA) has severely reduced the oversight function and ability of the Division of Travel Policy and Programs by moving it out of the Office of the Secretary and into a lower level operational travel office within the Program Support Center in Rockville, Maryland.
- The Secretary spent \$8,200 in taxpayer dollars on the use of a charter aircraft to travel 150 miles. It is my understanding that the Secretary traveled from Kansas City, Kansas, to Omaha, Nebraska in a charter aircraft rather than using an automobile at a small fraction of that cost.

- It also has been reported to my committee staff that on October 1, 2009, 76 Department officials traveled from Portland, Oregon to American Samoa in response to the September 29, 2009 tsunami/earthquake. These officials all allegedly flew on four separately chartered flights paid for by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), despite one of the flights having enough capacity to carry everyone. The chart below details the allegations that have been reported to our offices, and include departure and arrival times, aircraft types, capacities, and total travelers for each, as well as the reported costs

**Alleged Travel by HHS Staff – Portland, OR to American Samoa – October 1, 2009**

Departure Time (Portland)	Arrival Time (Samoa)	Aircraft Type	Aircraft Capacity	Travelers Onboard	Cost to Taxpayer	Cost Per Traveler
4:00am	10:00pm	<b>Gulfstream V</b> 	14	14	\$194,456	\$13,890
4:15am	10:18pm	<b>Gulfstream IV</b> 	13	7	\$147,642	\$21,092
5:15am	3:30pm	<b>Gulfstream 550</b> 	14	12	\$198,376	\$16,531
8:30am	4:00pm	<b>Boeing 737-800</b> 	177	43	\$337,950	\$7,859

In light of these allegations, please provide the following questions for the period of January 1, 2009 to the date of this letter:

- 1) Did the Department relocate (geographically and/or organizationally) the Division of Travel Policy and Programs? If so, why? Also, please address whether or not this will affect either directly or indirectly the oversight of travel at HHS?

- 2) Please provide information regarding any chartered flights taken by HHS officials where the travel distance is less than 250 miles, including a copy of the SA forms 1012 and 87 with Social Security numbers, and personal mailing addresses redacted.
- 3) Please explain why the Department and FEMA allegedly employed four aircraft, at a cost of \$878,424, to transport personnel to American Samoa when a single aircraft would have sufficed.
- 4) Please provide any authorizations related to the Samoa trip, as well as all relevant GSA forms 1012 and 87 with Social Security numbers, and personal mailing addresses redacted.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I request that your agency provide a response as soon as possible, and by no later than May 14, 2010. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Christopher Armstrong of my Committee staff at (202) 224-2415. All formal correspondence should be sent electronically in PDF format to [Brian\\_Downey@finance-rep.senate.gov](mailto:Brian_Downey@finance-rep.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member