

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

October 4, 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 Senior Senator from Iowa, I have a duty to conduct oversight into how federal entities spend taxpayer dollars in an era of unprecedented government spending and public debt. I also serve as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance (Committee), which has exclusive jurisdiction over the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). My duty to conduct oversight includes monitoring HHS activities to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used appropriately.

In February of this year, I wrote to you concerning expensive international travel by Department employees during the previous administration. This included an increase of 13.78% from fiscal year 2007 to fiscal year 2008, to \$63,192,925. I also wrote to you in May of this year regarding domestic travel and the use of charter aircraft by high ranking Department officials during the current administration. This included the use of charter aircraft to fly short distances and the expense of over \$878,000 to fly 76 Department personnel to American Samoa on four separate charter aircraft.

While no one doubts the importance of sending qualified medical personnel to assist in disaster relief efforts in American Samoa, I again urge you to reduce the use of charter aircraft for routine political events. I recently asked the Department about one case in particular, where the Department chartered an Eclipse 500 private jet aircraft to fly you from an event touting federal stimulus spending in Overland Park, Kansas, to an event promoting the President's health care reform agenda in Omaha, Nebraska. Rather than making the three hour drive from Overland Park to Omaha, the Department paid for an hour of motor vehicle transportation to Topeka, Kansas, and then chartered the jet aircraft for the 160-miles from Topeka to Omaha at an expense to taxpayers of well over \$8,000. My staff has repeatedly tried to get assurances in writing that this type of short-range jet travel had not occurred on multiple occasions but, as of the date of this letter, none has been given. Similarly, my staff tried to obtain a list of all charter aircraft travel by Department personnel but again I received no response.

American taxpayers trust their government to treat hard-earned tax dollars carefully and spend it frugally. Spending thousands of dollars to save such a small amount of time betrays this trust. I urge the Department to be more prudent in future travel spending, and trust you will take whatever actions necessary to reduce wasteful spending in the future.

Finally, and in light of the fact that the Department refuses to answer my very simple questions about charter travel, I intend to ask the Department's Inspector General to look into this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member