

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 28, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write today with respect to your non-responsive February 27, 2023, letter, which you sent to me on the same day that the Department of Transportation Inspector General (DOT IG) announced an audit of your use of taxpayer-funded private jets.¹ As I noted in my January letter, you made a quick trip to New York for a radio interview with a rapper, a short meeting with your own employees, and a quick visit with the ACLU president, a trip that was such a high priority for you that you used the taxpayer-funded FAA private jet to zip back and forth with all deliberate speed.² Meanwhile, the people of East Palestine, Ohio waited twenty days for you to visit in the wake of the tragic train derailment that has upended life in that small community and added yet another tragic chapter to the chain of transportation debacles since you took office.³ If there was ever a time to get on the FAA's private jet and rush somewhere, that was it. That ship, however, has sailed.

Using largely canned language, DOT's letter fails to meaningfully respond to any of my four official information requests. Moreover, DOT later sent a slim production of what appears to be a list of flights on the FAA's jet since 2021, but omitted any of the additional details that I requested, such as the Secretary's travel itineraries, justification for why non-commercial travel was chosen, and the full cost of each trip to taxpayers. Without this information, I am unable to determine whether your travel was proper or a waste and potentially fraudulent. Congress has a

¹ Letter from Mohsin Syed, Assistant Secretary of Government Affairs, U.S. Dep't of Transportation, to Charles E. Grassley, United States Senator (February 27, 2023), on file with Committee staff; U.S. Dep't of Transportation, Memorandum from Charles A. Ward, Principal Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations, to Assistant Secretary for Administration, "INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | OST's Compliance with Federal Policies and Procedures for Executive Travel on DOT Aircraft | Project No. 23A3005A000" (February 27, 2023), <https://www.oig.dot.gov/sites/default/files/OST%E2%80%99s%20Compliance%20With%20Federal%20Policies%20and%20Procedures%20for%20Executive%20Travel%20on%20DOT%20Aircraft%202-27-23.pdf>.

² The Breakfast Club, Pete Buttigieg and Tony Baker Interview with DJ Envy and Charlamagne Tha God! (Published April 8, 2022), <https://omny.fm/shows/the-breakfast-club/pete-buttigieg-and-tony-baker-interview>; Buttigieg Flew on Taxpayer-Funded Jet to Meet with ACLU President Only to Fly Back Hours Later, Americans for Public Trust (January 10, 2023), <https://americansforpublictrust.org/news/new-buttigieg-flew-on-taxpayer-funded-jet-to-meet-with-aclu-president-only-to-fly-back-hours-later/>.

³ Kelly Laco, Lawmakers Investigate Buttigieg for 'apathy' in the face of East Palestine train disaster, Fox News (February 27, 2023), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/lawmakers-investigate-buttigieg-apathy-face-east-palestine-train-disaster>.

duty to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in the use of taxpayer resources. Ignoring our legitimate congressional inquiries does nothing to further President Biden's pledge to bring transparency back to our government.⁴

The Department's February 27 letter also says that use of the FAA plane in specific cases can be more cost effective or efficient than travel on commercial airlines.⁵ It points out that you flew commercial airlines for 119 out of the 138 trips you have taken.⁶ While those things may be true, I am not asking about the 119 trips on commercial airlines, but the ones that involved the FAA's private jet, which, according to the numbers you provided, was used at least 18 times instead of commercial travel. The taxpayers deserve to know that not even *one* trip was inappropriate when using this more-expensive mode of travel. The Department's letter also points to the general DOT and FAA orders that govern the Department's management and use of government aircraft, without attempting to justify the specific travel I questioned.⁷ It is impossible for me to determine whether specific trips were appropriate without information on those trips, which you have withheld.

My requests for information are directly ordered to obtaining relevant information to determine whether any impropriety took place. If all of your trips were appropriate, one would expect you to willingly produce these records in unredacted form. While I am glad to hear your assistant secretary's assurance that these trips were proper, congressional oversight does not mean taking your word for it. That is why I made a request for documents backing up your claims to have followed governing laws and regulations, and I reiterate that demand with this letter.

Accordingly, and so that Congress may conduct robust and independent oversight of your travel, please immediately provide the information I requested last month:

1. Please provide a complete and itemized list of all non-commercial flights you have taken at taxpayer expense since taking office, including for each trip the dates, times, departure and destination airports; type of aircraft used; the agency, department, organization, or individual providing the aircraft; a complete passenger list, and your detailed itinerary, including any official or personal reasons for the travel;
2. Please provide a full and itemized accounting of all expenses incurred by the Department of Transportation or any other department or agency for these flights, including costs related to pilots, crew, maintenance, fuel, and leasing;
3. For each flight, please provide all records and communications referencing these flights, including records related to the approval of non-commercial travel, available

⁴ Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki (January 20, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/01/20/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-january-20-2021/>.

⁵ Letter from Mohsin Syed, *supra*.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

commercial alternatives for the travel, and any communications raising concerns about your use of non-commercial flights;

4. For each trip, please provide a description of why you believe the choice of a non-commercial flight was warranted, as well as a copy of all policies and directives within the Department regarding the selection of non-commercial travel and how these flights met those standards.

If you have any questions, please contact my staff at (202) 224-0642.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget

cc: The Honorable Eric J. Soskin
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Transportation