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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

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October 2, 2018

Dr. Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 23010

Dear Secretary Wilson,

I have questions about yet another report of wasteful spending in the Department of Defense.

In an article on foxnews.com, it was reported that the 60th Ariel Port Squadron at Travis Air Force Base has spent nearly \$56,000 on cups that can reheat liquids during flight over the last three years. This year alone, 25 cups were purchased at a cost of \$1,280 per cup.

Despite the exorbitant price tag, this squadron reports that the cups have handles that break easily when dropped, and since spare parts are not available, the whole cup must be replaced. A team at Travis Air Force Base has reportedly come up with a solution to the breaking handles, which will save the Air Force the cost of constantly replacing the cup. While it is laudable that the men and women at Travis Air Force Base took action to curb this wasteful spending, this does not address the puzzling question of why the Air Force is buying these cups at such a high cost to begin with.

According to officials at Travis Air Force Base, each cup cost \$693 in 2016. In the last 2 years, that price has nearly doubled. Paying nearly \$700 for a single cup is bad enough, but it's simply beyond reason to continue to pay ever-increasing prices for something as simple as a coffee cup that is so fragile that it needs to be constantly replaced.

As you know, earlier this year I raised concerns about overpriced toilet seat lids purchased by the Air Force. I still have yet to receive satisfactory answers to my questions on that matter.

This latest example of reckless spending of taxpayer dollars gives me no confidence that the Air Force is taking real steps to reduce wasteful spending practices. This report also heightens my concern that the DOD Office of Inspector General is not prioritizing oversight of wasteful spending.

To address these concerns, I request a response to the following questions.

- 1) The 60th Ariel Port Squadron at Travis Air Force Base has reportedly spent \$56,000 on replacing hot cups since 2016. How many cups have been purchased by the Air Force during this timeframe, and what is the total cost of these purchases?
- 2) Why has the price of the hot cup increased from \$693 in 2016 to \$1,280 in 2018?
- 3) What cheaper alternatives for providing hot coffee to crew have been explored by the Air Force? Is this particular cup truly necessary, or are there other more cost effective options available?
- 4) Will you be asking the Office of Inspector General to review spending on these high-priced cups to determine if the Air Force did an adequate job of looking at alternatives, and what would have been a better choice?

Every dollar that is spent on overpriced spare parts or replacement hot cups is a dollar that should have been spent on ensuring our national defense. As Congress looks to authorize future defense spending, it is important to have understand what the money is being spent on, and why. Please respond to these questions by no later than October 14, 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Senator Charles E. Grassley

CC: Department of Defense Office of Inspector General