



OFFICE OF  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

# **INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON SECRETARY ZINKE'S USE OF CHARTERED AND MILITARY AIRCRAFT BETWEEN MARCH AND SEPTEMBER 2017**

**This is a revised version of the report prepared for public release**

## SYNOPSIS

We investigated several allegations of travel-related waste by U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Ryan Zinke. Our investigation focused on whether Zinke's use of chartered flights and U.S. military aircraft followed relevant law, policy, rules, and regulations. We also examined the purpose of each trip for which a chartered flight was used to determine whether the DOI had incurred travel expenses for non-DOI-related events and whether the uses and costs of these flights were reasonable or unavoidable. We are reviewing other issues pertaining to Zinke's travel, including the use of DOI-owned vehicles, in a separate investigation.

We determined that Zinke's use of chartered flights in fiscal year (FY) 2017 generally followed relevant law, policy, rules, and regulations. We found, however, that a June 2017 trip during which he used a \$12,375 chartered flight after speaking at the developmental camp for the Golden Knights, a National Hockey League team in Las Vegas, was reviewed and approved by DOI ethics officials without complete information, and that the use of the chartered flight might have been avoided if the DOI employees who were scheduling Zinke's trip had worked with the Golden Knights to better accommodate his schedule. We also determined that Zinke had been aware of the Golden Knights event as early as March 7, 2017, and that a grant announcement in nearby Pahrump, NV, was scheduled after Zinke and his staff had already planned to be in Las Vegas for the event. While it was Zinke's chief of staff, Scott Hommel, who ultimately authorized the trip and the cost of the flight, he said he did so based in part on approval from the Ethics Office.

We also reviewed the costs associated with Zinke's trips on Air Force One and Air Force Two (AF1 and AF2) and other military aircraft. We found that in FY 2017, the DOI obligated \$185,203.75 for Zinke's flights on these aircraft, including \$52,000 for two flights—one on AF1 and one on AF2—that Zinke had been invited on but ultimately did not take. Although Zinke did not fly on these occasions, the White House still billed the DOI for his passage on AF1 and AF2, and the DOI paid the obligations.

We provided this report to the Deputy Secretary of the Interior for any action deemed appropriate.

## DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

We initiated this investigation on September 29, 2017, in response to allegations that U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Ryan Zinke’s use of chartered aircraft was improper and a waste of U.S. Government funds. Our investigation focused on Zinke’s use of chartered and military flights, including a June 2017 chartered flight he took from Las Vegas, NV, to Kalispell, MT, after giving a speech at the developmental camp of the Vegas Golden Knights, a professional hockey team. We examined whether this chartered flight and several others followed relevant law, policy, rules, and regulations. In addition, we examined the purpose of each trip in which a chartered flight was used to determine whether the DOI had incurred travel expenses for non-DOI-related events and whether the uses and costs of these flights were reasonable or unavoidable.

We also reviewed the costs associated with Zinke’s trips on Air Force One and Air Force Two (AF1 and AF2) and other military aircraft during fiscal year (FY) 2017.

We are reviewing other issues pertaining to Zinke’s travel, including the use of DOI-owned vehicles, in a separate investigation.

### **Zinke’s Use of Chartered Flights**

For this investigation, we reviewed three trips in which Zinke used chartered flights (Figure 1).

<b>Flight Details</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Las Vegas, NV, to Kalispell, MT	6/26/17	\$12,375
St. Croix and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands	3/31/17	\$3,150
Flights between Deadhorse, Alpine, and Fairbanks, AK	5/27/17	\$3,932
		<b>\$19,457 (total)</b>

Figure 1. Zinke’s chartered flights in FY 2017.

We found that the use of chartered flights for each of these trips underwent a legal review and approval process by DOI staff. For each flight, the DOI’s Office of Aviation Services (OAS) completed a travel cost analysis, which was signed by attorneys from the DOI’s Office of the Solicitor and approved by Edward Keable, Deputy Solicitor for General Law, per 41 C.F.R. §§ 301-10 and 301-70 and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s Circular A-126.

Our investigation also focused on whether each trip’s purpose justified the use and cost of the chartered aircraft. We found that the chartered flight Zinke took from Las Vegas to Montana could have been avoided, but the other two chartered flights we reviewed appeared to have been reasonable as related to official DOI business. We detail our investigative results in the sections below.

### *Use and Purpose of Chartered Flight During Nevada Trip*

On June 26, 2017, Zinke traveled to Las Vegas, NV, to give a leadership speech at the Golden Knights' developmental camp. According to a Golden Knights employee, the developmental camp was a weeklong event in which recently drafted Golden Knights players were to learn about the team and how to be part of the organization. An "Event Proposal Information Form" the Golden Knights employee submitted to Zinke's office on March 30, 2017, invited Zinke to speak to the "hockey prospects" about teamwork during a dinner at the opening of the camp.

According to the proposal, the audience for the speech consisted of approximately 44 hockey players between the ages of 18 and 23, plus Golden Knights scouting staff, hockey operations staff, and coaches. Heather Swift, the DOI's spokesperson, asserted in a September 2017 news article that this was a "key audience of people we are trying to target to use our public lands."

The Las Vegas event was one of several engagements Zinke had over the course of 3 days in Nevada and Montana. According to Zinke's official travel schedule, his itinerary involved four major official events (shown below in Figure 2).

<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date, Time of Day</b>
Republican Attorney General Association/Rule of Law Defense Fund reception and dinner	Incline Village/Tahoe, NV	6/25/17, evening
Meeting with county commissioners and announcement of Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) grants *	Pahrump, NV	6/26/17, afternoon
Vegas Golden Knights developmental camp speech	Las Vegas, NV	6/26/17, evening
Western Governors' Association (WGA) annual meeting	Whitefish, MT	6/27/17, morning

Figure 2. Zinke's schedule of events, June 25 through 27, 2017.

\* PILT grants are Federal payments to local governments that help offset losses in property taxes due to nontaxable Federal lands within their boundaries (Pub. L. 94-565; Pub. L. 97-258, amended). The law recognizes that the inability of local governments to collect property taxes on federally owned land can create a financial impact.

On June 26, the day after the Tahoe event, Zinke and three staff members flew from Reno, NV, to Las Vegas on a commercial flight, at a total cost of \$808.80 (\$202.20 per person). They then drove to Pahrump for the PILT grant announcement and later drove back to Las Vegas for the Golden Knights event. This event ended after the last commercial flight had left the local airport. Because Zinke was scheduled to be in Whitefish, MT, the following morning for the WGA meeting, a chartered flight was used to transport him and four DOI personnel from Las Vegas to Kalispell, MT. The DOI incurred a cost of \$12,375 (\$2,475 per person) for chartering this flight.

## Las Vegas Speaking Engagement Reviewed and Approved Without Complete Information

We determined that DOI ethics officials could not adequately review the purpose of the Golden Knights event before approving the speaking engagement because DOI staff who helped schedule Zinke's travel did not provide enough information for the ethics officials to render an educated opinion. The speech to the team, which did not mention Zinke's position as Interior Secretary or the activities of the DOI, occurred the evening before Zinke was scheduled to attend an official meeting in Montana. If ethics officials had known Zinke's speech would have no nexus to the DOI, they likely would not have approved this as an official event, thus eliminating the need for a chartered flight. Moreover, had ethics officials been made aware that the Golden Knights' owner had been a donor to Zinke's congressional campaign, it might have prompted further review and discussion.

Scheduling staff presented the itinerary for this trip to Melinda Loftin, the DOI's then-designated agency ethics official (and currently a DOI ethics attorney), during a meeting in June 2017. We interviewed Loftin, who said she was told the speech was for the Golden Knights' "developmental team," which she surmised meant a youth team, not the professional team. She said she most likely had this discussion with a DOI employee who helped schedule the Secretary's travel.

Loftin said that given the DOI's mission of "reaching out" to young people, its efforts to involve people in outdoor activities, and its overall leadership ideals, she felt the speech to the Golden Knights was within Zinke's mission as Secretary of the Interior. She said she discussed this trip with Ed McDonnell, her then-deputy and the current designated agency ethics official, who agreed that it was within the purview of Zinke's official duties.

Loftin said that she had not known that the team's owner had donated to Zinke's congressional campaign until it was mentioned in a newspaper article. She said that fact alone probably would not have changed her opinion about whether Zinke could speak at the event in an official capacity, but if she had known the owner had been a donor, she might have discussed the optics of Zinke's involvement with Daniel Jorjani, Acting Solicitor and Principal Deputy Solicitor.

Loftin also said that she had known Zinke would have to use a chartered flight after the Golden Knights event to get to the next location on his schedule but that she had not known the cost until she read about it in the newspaper. She said that when reviewing the Secretary's travel, she frequently considered how individual events or situations might appear to the press or the public, but she did not recall worrying about this particular event.

After reviewing a video of Zinke's speech to the Golden Knights, Loftin acknowledged that the speech was not what she had expected Zinke to talk about. Although Swift has stated to the media that the attendees were a "key audience" of the DOI, Loftin noted that Zinke never mentioned the DOI or his role as Secretary in the speech and that the speech itself concentrated on his experience as a Navy SEAL. Loftin said that the speech was "sort of an inspirational-type speech, one that a coach might give either before a game [or] during the locker room at halftime," and that it had "no tie" to the DOI. "It certainly should have been tied to the Department of the Interior and in some way reflective of our mission," she said, for it to qualify as an official event.

Loftin said that when she originally told a DOI employee who was helping to schedule the trip that this leadership speech could be part of Zinke's official duties, she mentioned former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's past speeches to various groups, during which Jewell would tie the concept of leadership into the DOI mission and, in particular, talk about inspiring children to spend time in national parks and the outdoors.

According to Jorjani, the speaking engagement to the Golden Knights aligned with the DOI's priorities. When he was told that Loftin had not known about the team owner's relationship with Zinke or what the demographic of the audience would be at the developmental camp when she made the decision that Zinke could give the speech in his official capacity, Jorjani maintained that the trip was "ten thousand percent compliant."

We also interviewed the DOI employee who helped schedule the trip, and this employee did not recall Loftin saying that Zinke's speech should mention or focus on the DOI. The employee said she had explained to Loftin during their meeting that Zinke wanted to give the Golden Knights a speech about leadership and his experience with the Navy SEALs and that Loftin had agreed that leadership was an important value in the DOI. According to the employee, Loftin said that not all speeches had to relate to specific DOI policy and that the Golden Knights' developmental camp was a "target area" of the DOI to spread the leadership message.

A Solicitor's Office employee who attended this meeting and took part in the discussion recalled Loftin asking if Zinke would be talking about DOI assets and the scheduling staff telling her that Zinke wanted to give a speech about leadership, including his service as Interior Secretary and his time as a Navy SEAL. She told us that Loftin said at the meeting that she was comfortable labeling this as an official event.

Loftin told us that in the future there should be more discussion when reviewing these types of events. Her office had not reviewed Zinke's speech beforehand, and she said that this was typical: "Very rarely . . . would we see a speech before someone gives it."

Although McDonnell was not involved in the review of this trip or approval of the event, he agreed with Loftin's assessment of the speech. He said the speech seemed like a "pep talk" to a "very new professional hockey team," where Zinke spoke primarily about his background as a Navy SEAL.

McDonnell said he had expected the speech to have some connection to the DOI, and he was surprised that it did not. When asked whether the trip would have been approved if the Ethics Office had known the substance of the speech and the cost of the chartered flight ahead of time, McDonnell said, "I don't know if it would have been approved as an official event." He said he would have questioned the purpose of the trip if he had known that Zinke's speech mentioned nothing about the DOI or Zinke's role as Secretary.

McDonnell acknowledged that, in hindsight, the Ethics Office had not had enough information about the speech to determine that it could be an official event. "We obviously didn't know enough of what was going to happen," he said.

McDonnell explained that although Loftin had determined the speech could be an official event, the Ethics Office personnel were not the “final arbiters” of whether trips should be approved. When asked who was ultimately responsible for the trip and the content of the speech, McDonnell said it was the responsibility of the individual—in this case, Zinke.

Zinke’s chief of staff, Scott Hommel, said that he was the final approving official for the Golden Knights event but that he would not have approved it without prior review and approval by the Ethics Office and the Solicitor’s Office. Hommel said he did not speak directly with Loftin and McDonnell about the event, but he said he had heard that Loftin thought it was “great” that Zinke was speaking to the developmental team.

Hommel said he learned sometime before the trip about the need for the chartered flight and its cost. He acknowledged that the cost of the flight seemed high, but added that a cabinet secretary “needs to get where he needs to get,” so Hommel approved it. He said the Ethics Office had “signed off” on the speech as an official event, one that he thought was worthwhile for Zinke to attend.

We interviewed Zinke, who said that the purpose of his attendance at the Golden Knights event was to give a speech about leadership to the inaugural hockey team. “They’re leaders in the community,” he explained.

When asked what the speech was about, Zinke said, “It’s a motivational speech. Because I have a background as a SEAL.” He said he spoke to them as a former Navy SEAL instructor and stressed the importance of working hard, staying out of trouble, and maintaining their focus. When asked why he did not mention the DOI in his speech, Zinke said the idea of “leadership” was itself a core DOI value and that he had not been told that the speech needed to reference the DOI. Zinke stressed that the Ethics Office and the Solicitor’s Office had approved the event. He said he did not know whether the Ethics Office employees had been told that the team’s owner had been a campaign donor of his, but he did not think that would have made a difference in their decision.

#### Grant Announcement Location Selected After Zinke Planned To Be in Las Vegas

On the afternoon of June 26, before Zinke was to speak to the Golden Knights, he made a public appearance in Pahrump, NV—approximately 60 miles from Las Vegas—to announce the DOI’s annual award of PILT grants. We determined that the location of the PILT announcement was selected after Zinke and his staff already planned to be in Las Vegas for the Golden Knights event, and that Zinke had been aware of the Golden Knights event as early as March 7, 2017, 6 days after he became Secretary.

Loftin and McDonnell both said that Zinke first mentioned during his initial ethics briefing in March 2017 that he wanted to speak to a friend’s hockey team. Loftin said that Zinke did not elaborate and that they did not discuss the matter in detail at that time. McDonnell gave us copies of his handwritten notes from that briefing, dated March 7, 2017; the notes included the team owner’s name and information about the invitation for Zinke to speak to the team in June.

The DOI employee who helped schedule the trip said she received a phone call in early March 2017, followed by an email, from a Golden Knights employee inviting Zinke to speak at the team's developmental camp on Monday evening, June 26, 2017. (We determined that this was the same Golden Knights employee we interviewed for this investigation.) The DOI employee said she mentioned the event to Zinke and he already knew about it, referring to it as the "hockey event" and stating that he was excited to give the speech.

The DOI employee said that someone from another DOI office also contacted her and reminded her that Zinke had been asked to speak at the WGA's annual meeting, which was scheduled for June in Whitefish, MT, so she began planning Zinke's itinerary with both events in mind. She said that she first heard about the invitation for Zinke to speak to the WGA in February 2017, but Zinke had not arrived at the DOI yet so she did not address it until she began planning his itinerary. In May 2017, she received an email from the White House stating that the Republican Attorney General Association had asked Zinke to be the keynote speaker at a June 25 event in Lake Tahoe sponsored by the Rule of Law Defense Fund.

According to the DOI employee, the PILT grant announcement was the final event to be included in the itinerary. She said that Olivia Ferriter, from the DOI Office of Policy, Management and Budget, contacted her and said that the PILT grants were available to be announced, preferably in conjunction with the WGA event.

Ferriter corroborated this, stating that she would have spoken with someone about the PILT grants in May 2017. She said the funds, which were distributed annually, were typically released the last week of June. She explained that every year there was an announcement about the funds, which she coordinated with the Secretary's Office, and that these announcements were usually done through press releases. She could not recall whether any prior Secretary had traveled to a specific location to make a PILT grant announcement.

The DOI employee said she coordinated with an employee in another DOI office to select a location in Las Vegas for Zinke to announce the PILT grants. We interviewed the second DOI employee, who told us the city of Las Vegas did not have an interest in PILT grants, so the city of Pahrump, NV, was selected. Neither DOI employee could recall the date they coordinated with each other, but it would have been sometime after Ferriter's notification about the PILT grants in May 2017.

When asked whether his speech to the Golden Knights was the first event on that trip's itinerary to be planned, Zinke initially said no, but he then acknowledged that it could have been. "But it didn't drive the schedule," he said. "The priority was not the hockey team."

Zinke recalled that around March or April 2017, after he became Interior Secretary, he was asked to speak to the Golden Knights. He said the invitation came from a Golden Knights official, although the team's owner had also asked him. Zinke said that the owner was a friend and that he had told the owner he would consider a speaking engagement the next time he was in Nevada. He said that when Pahrump, NV, was selected as the location for the PILT grant announcements, he saw it as an opportunity to speak to the Golden Knights. Zinke said that Nevada, and particularly Pahrump—a small town where no Interior Secretary had ever visited, according to



Zinke—was an “appropriate” venue to announce the PILT grants since the Federal Government owned 90 percent of Nevada’s land.

### Use of Chartered Flight Could Have Been Avoided

The use of the chartered flight from Las Vegas to Kalispell, MT, could have been avoided if the speech to the Golden Knights had not been on Zinke’s itinerary or if the time of the event had been changed.

According to Zinke’s schedule, the PILT grant announcement concluded at 3:40 p.m. in Pahrump, NV, on Monday, June 26, 2017. Pahrump is approximately 60 miles from both McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas and the Golden Knights’ developmental camp, which Zinke was scheduled to attend from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. that same evening.

The DOI employee who helped schedule the trip said she “triple checked” commercial flights and found that none were available that could get Zinke from Las Vegas to Montana on Monday after the Golden Knights event or early enough on Tuesday morning to accommodate Zinke’s morning speaking engagement at the WGA conference. She said she coordinated with another DOI employee about locating a chartered flight.

This DOI employee said he contacted the DOI’s Office of Aviation Services (OAS) to secure a chartered flight. We reviewed an OAS-110 form that contained a travel cost analysis and a justification for the use of the chartered plane. According to the “Remarks” section on the form, no commercial airlines were available to accommodate Zinke’s schedule because the last commercial flight from Las Vegas to Kalispell departed at 6:50 p.m., while Zinke was still scheduled to be at the Golden Knights event.

We found that DOI employees made no attempt to discuss rescheduling Zinke’s speech to the Golden Knights. According to the Golden Knights employee we interviewed, the camp lasted a week. When asked if the schedule had been flexible enough to allow Zinke to speak later in the week, the employee acknowledged that it had been; she said if June 26 had not worked for Zinke, they “would have shifted things around.”

We also interviewed a Golden Knights official, who agreed that the event schedule had some flexibility. “If he [Zinke] said, ‘Look, I can’t be there on a Monday, but I could be there on a Tuesday,’” the official said, “then I would imagine we would have said, ‘Well, that’s great. . . . Why don’t you come Tuesday?’” The official added that the camp agenda was not “set in stone.”

The DOI employee who helped schedule the trip said that when she realized there were no commercial flights available between Las Vegas and Montana after the Golden Knights event, she asked Chief of Staff Scott Hommel if she could ask the team whether it could adjust the event’s schedule. She said that he told her no, that it was a “firm event.” She said she had this conversation with him a week or two before Zinke’s trip.

Hommel said he did not recall anyone asking to contact the Golden Knights and discuss adjusting the schedule to better accommodate Zinke’s itinerary. He said the DOI employee had “probably” mentioned to him that no commercial flights were available, but he did not recall her

asking him about trying to adjust the schedule. He said that if she had, he would have told her to do it. He also said he did not remember telling her not to contact the team, but added that if she said he did, then he probably did.

#### *Use and Purpose of Chartered Flights During U.S. Virgin Islands Trip*

In March 2017, during Zinke's visit to the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), the DOI incurred a cost of \$3,150 for chartering two airplanes to take him and his staff from the island of St. Croix to the island of St. Thomas and back. According to his official travel schedule for March 30 through April 1, 2017, and a spreadsheet labeled "Trip Itineraries with Political & Personal Stops," his itinerary consisted of several official events associated with the centennial of the transfer of the USVI to the United States. On March 30, 2017, Zinke also attended a political event sponsored by the Virgin Islands GOP (VIGOP) on St. Croix.

We determined that Zinke's office received an invitation from USVI Governor Kenneth E. Mapp, dated February 22, 2017, inviting Zinke to attend the commemorative ceremonies in honor of the 100th anniversary of the transfer of the islands to the United States. This invitation predated March 28 and 29 email correspondence between Zinke's office and the VIGOP, in which Zinke's attendance at the VIGOP political event was discussed. According to the DOI employee who helped schedule the trip, her office would share Zinke's itineraries ahead of time with the White House, and the White House could request Zinke's attendance at political events that might take place in the area of his travel.

Another DOI employee said she reviewed the availability of flights to take Zinke and his staff from St. Croix to St. Thomas and back so he could attend official events on both islands. She said that the DOI did not have any contracts with vendors in the USVI, so she had to find a vendor she could put under the DOI contract, which involved sending someone down to the USVI to inspect the aircraft and the pilot.

An OAS-110 form, which contained a travel cost analysis and justification for the use of the chartered planes, was also completed. According to the "Remarks" section on the form, no commercial airlines were available to accommodate Zinke's schedule, and no DOI fleet aircraft were available within a reasonable distance.

The manifest included with the travel cost analysis listed eight passengers (seven DOI employees, including Zinke, and a maintenance mechanic). At \$3,150 for the flights, the cost per seat came to approximately \$393.

Zinke's attendance at the VIGOP event was reviewed and approved by the Ethics and General Law offices. In accordance with the Hatch Act, the VIGOP reimbursed the DOI the cost of Zinke's time at the event (\$274.29).

#### *Use and Purpose of Chartered Flight During Alaska Trip*

In May 2017, the DOI incurred a cost of \$3,932 for Zinke's and three staff members' portion of a chartered flight between the Alaska cities of Deadhorse, Alpine, and Fairbanks as part of a

congressional delegation invited by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). This cost amounted to \$983 per person.

According to a March 6, 2017 invitation, Murkowski invited Zinke on a congressional delegation trip that would “examine current and future energy potential in the Arctic” and that included visits to northern Norway, Thule Air Base in Greenland, energy facilities on Alaska’s North Slope, and the non-wilderness area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. According to the invitation, the congressional delegation would provide an overview of existing energy development and infrastructure capacity in the Arctic, as well as highlight the need for future energy production in the region.

An OAS-110 and travel cost analysis for the use of this chartered flight was completed, reviewed, and approved, with an annotation on the form stating, “This is a congressional charter. DOI has no operational control over aircraft, [and] is only paying for seats of DOI personnel.” Reimbursement for the DOI’s portion of the flight was requested via email by an employee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, who emailed an invoice to Zinke’s office.

### **Secretary Zinke’s Passage on Air Force One, Air Force Two, and Other Military Aircraft**

We also reviewed all occasions when Zinke was a passenger on AF1, AF2, and other military aircraft (see Figure 3). Records and interviews indicated that Zinke flew on AF1 four times in FY 2017, each time at the request of the White House. On two additional occasions, Zinke was scheduled to fly on AF1 and AF2 but was subsequently removed from the invitation, although DOI still incurred costs associated with those trips.

<b>Flight Destination</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Billings, MT *	5/14/17	\$12,000.00
Bismarck, ND *	9/6/17	\$40,000.00
Atlanta, GA	4/28/17	\$15,000.00
Cincinnati, OH	6/7/17	\$30,000.00
Glen Jean, WV	7/24/17	\$40,000.00
Youngstown, OH	7/25/17	\$20,000.00
Norway; Greenland; Alaska	5/26/17	No cost to DOI
Camp David, MD	9/9/17	No cost to DOI
Montana; Knoxville †	8/24/17	\$28,203.75
		<b>\$185,203.75 (total)</b>

Figure 3. Zinke’s flights on military aircraft in 2017.

\* Zinke did not fly on either the Billings or the Bismarck trip.

† The amount of the Montana/Knoxville flight has been obligated but not yet invoiced or paid.

We interviewed a DOI Budget Office employee, who confirmed that it was common practice for the White House to invoice the DOI for Interior secretaries’ trips on AF1 and AF2. She said the costs associated with prior secretaries’ trips on AF1 and AF2 were comparable to Zinke’s.

The budget employee said that Hommel gave her reimbursement agreements submitted by the White House for the trips and that she processed them so that the DOI could obligate the money. According to a DOI employee who created the request to obligate funds in the DOI's Financial and Business Management System, each reimbursement agreement requested a dollar amount not to exceed a certain figure, and it was this amount that was obligated and ultimately collected by the White House. At some later date, once the actual bill was reconciled by the White House, any funds in excess of the flight costs would be returned to the DOI.

The budget employee acknowledged that the cost for Interior secretaries to fly on AF1 and AF2 was high and that she never saw a cost breakdown of what the DOI was actually paying for. "We're providing financial support for funding the official event and travel costs associated with [it]," she said, but when asked whether the DOI knew what those travel costs entailed, she said, "I don't know."

#### *AF1 and AF2 Flights That Incurred Costs Despite Zinke's Absence*

We identified two occasions on which Zinke was invited to fly on AF1 and AF2 only to have the invitations revoked, yet the DOI was still billed for his passage on the flights and paid the obligations. According to records we reviewed, the first occasion was a flight to Billings, MT, scheduled for May 2017, and the second was to Bismarck, ND, scheduled for September 2017. The total amount obligated for both flights was \$52,000.

A DOI employee confirmed this, stating that Zinke had been invited on both trips but ultimately did not go on either. She said the budget employee had informed her that the reimbursement costs of these flights had already been obligated to the White House even though Zinke ultimately did not take them.

The budget employee recalled the Bismarck trip and confirmed that although Zinke did not fly, the DOI still paid for the trip. She said that when she learned Zinke would not be going, she contacted someone at the DOI's Bureau of Land Management—which was supposed to be paying for this particular flight—about deobligating the money, but she subsequently received an email from the White House saying the DOI still had to pay for the flight whether Zinke went or not. According to the employee, the money was then reobligated, and the trip was paid for. We confirmed this statement by reviewing an email the employee received from the Executive Office of the President, which stated that although Zinke was ultimately excluded from the trip, the White House was still "counting on the support" for the "funding of this event."

#### *AF1 Flights on Which Zinke Was a Passenger*

Zinke flew on AF1 on four occasions at the invitation of the White House. In April 2017, he attended a National Rifle Association convention in Atlanta, GA, with the President, and gave a speech there. In June 2017, he attended a presidential media event in Cincinnati, OH. In July 2017, he traveled to Glen Jean, WV, with the President to attend the Boy Scout Jamboree; then to Youngstown, OH, the following day for another event with the President. According to documents obtained from the DOI's Financial and Business Management System, the total cost the DOI obligated for these flights was \$105,000.

*Flights on Other Military Aircraft*

Zinke flew on other military aircraft three times in FY 2017. The DOI did not pay for two of these flights, which included a congressional delegation to Norway in May 2017 and a helicopter ride to Camp David in September 2017.

The third trip was a shared flight to Montana with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue in August 2017 to view wildfires. The DOI was required to pay half the cost of this flight, which came to \$28,203.75. To date, this amount has been obligated but has not yet been invoiced or paid.

**SUBJECT**

Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior.

**DISPOSITION**

We provided this report to the Deputy Secretary of the Interior for any action deemed appropriate.

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