



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 2, 2017

HHS Secretary Tom Price Resigns Over Brewing Travel Scandal

Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price (shown) resigned September 29 over charges that he misused taxpayer monies by taking flights on private charters and military jets instead of cheaper commercial airlines. Politico.com first reported September 12 that while traveling on official government business, Price had taken private charters costing taxpayers nearly \$400,000 and military flights at about \$500,000, while commercial flights would have cost tens of thousands of dollars less.



Politico reported that five flights scheduled between September 13 and 15 took Price to a resort in Maine where he participated in a Q&A with a healthcare industry CEO, and to community health centers in New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

President Trump responded to the report by saying that he was “not happy” with allegations that members of his Cabinet were wasting money on private flights. “I was disappointed,” President Trump told reporters. “This is an administration that saves hundreds of millions of dollars on renegotiating things on new trade deals,” he added, saying that he did not like the perception a Cabinet member was doing something amiss.

While Trump stopped short of saying that he would fire Price, shortly after his comments the White House announced that the HHS secretary had resigned. “Secretary of Health and Human Services Thomas Price offered his resignation earlier today and the president accepted,” White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced late Friday (September 29).

Sanders added that the president intended to appoint Don Wright, a deputy assistant secretary for health and the director of the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, as acting HHS secretary.

In his resignation letter Price said that “I have spent 40 years both as a doctor and public servant putting people first. I regret that the recent events have created a distraction from these important objectives. Success on these issues is more important than any one person. In order for you to move forward without further disruption, I am officially tendering my resignation.”

Price said that he would reimburse the government with a check for nearly \$52,000 to help defer the costs of his private flights.

Among those coming to Price’s defense was House Speaker Paul Ryan, who served with him when Price was a Republican House member from Georgia. Ryan called Price a “a good man” who “has spent his entire adult life fighting for others, first as a physician and then as a legislator and public servant. He was a leader in the House and a superb health secretary. His vision and hard work were vital to the House’s success passing our health care legislation.”

By contrast, Democrats took the opportunity to criticize Trump for not living up to his promise to “drain the swamp” of profligate spenders in D.C. “Today, yet another of his top officials has resigned in



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disgrace,” said Representative David Cicilline (D-R.I.) in a statement following Price’s resignation. “Enough is enough. Republicans in Congress have given Donald Trump and his administration a blank check to do whatever they want. It’s long past time for them to work with Democrats to conduct real oversight that prevents this type of abuse. Looking the other way cannot be tolerated a single moment longer.”

For his part, Trump quickly handed oversight of travel by Cabinet members to Chief of Staff John Kelly, reported [Fox News](#). In a September 29 memo, Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney wrote that Kelly would be given the authority to sign off on travel arrangements by Cabinet members. Fox News reported that the “new protocol exempts those required to fly on government planes for security reasons, like the secretary of defense and secretary of state.”

In his memo, Mulvaney wrote that “we are public servants. Every penny we spend comes from the taxpayer. We thus owe it to the taxpayer to work as hard managing that money wisely as the taxpayer must do to earn it in the first place.”

The DailySignal.com noted that during Barack Obama’s administration, a 2013 Government Accountability Office report revealed similar questionable flights taken by Justice Department officials. “Two luxury jets the FBI had said were needed for security against global terrorism were used instead by Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director Robert Mueller,” reported the website. Additionally, “Holder’s predecessors in the George W. Bush administration, Attorneys General Michael Mukasey and Alberto Gonzales, also used the jets. It came at a total cost of \$11.4 million, the GAO found.” Additionally, according to Fox News, in 2014 Holder flew with family members in a government-owned Gulfstream jet to New York’s Belmont Stakes horse race. The cost of the trip reportedly came \$14,440, for which Holder reimbursed the government \$955. And the *Washington Times* reported that Obama CIA Director Leon Panetta refunded the federal government \$630 for multiple jet flights he took costing \$32,000 per trip.

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