

House Democrats Get Head Start on Trump Health Policy Probes

By Shira Stein

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- House Oversight Committee to start with family separation policy, airplane travel
- Jan. 11 is deadline for sending panel the requested information

Democrats are taking steps to increase scrutiny of the Trump administration's health-care policies even before they take charge of the House in January.

The first priority for Democrats on the House Oversight Committee is to get information that House Republicans have already requested, a committee spokesperson told Bloomberg Law. The committee members will look at any potential policy changes after conducting those initial investigations.

House Democrats are likely to cast a harsh spotlight on the Trump administration in the next Congress, focusing on the changes the HHS has been making to health-care policy.

Caitlin Oakley, a spokeswoman for HHS, said the department would respond to lawmakers' requests "in a timely fashion."

The incoming House Oversight Committee Chairman, Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), sent letters Dec. 19 to the Department of Health and Human Services, among other agencies, to ask for more information about the family separation policy and the use of airplane travel by administration officials. The information previously had been requested by the current oversight chairman, Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.)

Cummings is giving the HHS a deadline of Jan. 11 to get the committee the previously requested information.

Family Separation Policy

After the Trump administration implemented a "zero tolerance policy" that led to children being separated from their parents at the southern U.S. border, the committee sent a letter to the HHS, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Justice Department.

The HHS is responsible for sheltering children who were separated from their parents after being brought into the U.S., and the committee asked the department for information about the children and parents, the locations and facilities they were held, their separation and reunification, and any other immediate family members.

The committee has yet to receive that information. The Trump administration stopped that policy, but the HHS is still sheltering children who were separated while the policy was active.

The DHS did not respond to a request for comment.

Airplane Travel

The committee asked the HHS and 23 other agencies and departments for information about the use of government-owned aircraft for personal travel or private, non-commercial airplane for official travel, including the policies for doing so and each use of a private, non-commercial plane.

That investigation request was prompted by reporting that found former HHS Secretary Tom Price traveled by private planes, breaking federal rules.

The HHS partially complied but did not respond to all aspects of the air travel request, an oversight committee spokesperson said. That was true for all of the agencies the committee sent letters to about airplane travel.

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