

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement Chairman Elijah E. Cummings Committee Budget Request for the 116th Congress 2 p.m.—1310 Longworth House Office Building March 12, 2019

Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding our budget submission for the Committee on Oversight and Reform for the 116th Congress.

As you know, we submitted our formal request on Friday with the supporting documentation. I will not recount everything in that submission, but I would like to briefly make four key points.

First, over the past ten years, the Oversight Committee's budget has been reduced dramatically, from about \$22.3 million in the 111th Congress to about \$18.3 million in the last Congress. For the Committee's review, I have submitted a summary of our budget reductions over the last decade. I understand that there were many reasons for that, but the bottom-line is that we have not been able to fill our allocated staffing slots in many years. At our existing funding level, we will have 25 vacancies for existing staff slots that we are not able to fill. Fifteen of these vacancies are on the majority staff, and ten are on the minority staff.

Second, we understand the financial challenges you are facing, and we have tried to respect those limitations. As a result, we are not asking for full funding to restore us to the levels we were at ten years ago. The Oversight Committee would need a funding increase of approximately 22.3% to restore funding to the level a decade ago. Instead, we are requesting only a modest 4% increase this year, followed by a 10% increase next year. From my perspective, this would be a down-payment towards restoring full Committee funding in future years to fill the essential oversight staff positions that have long been vacant.

Third, I understand that other committees may be seeking much bigger increases, some even as large as 20%. However, I would like to point out that in the last Congress, the Oversight Committee received one of the most miniscule increases compared to other committees. Our Committee's 1.11% increase was the second smallest among 20 House committees. Other committee increases ranged from 2% to more than 30%.

I supported Chairman Chaffetz's larger budget request in the last Congress, but unfortunately it was not approved. I also supported every other budget request from our previous republican colleagues as well.

Finally, our work in particular is designed to root out waste, fraud, and abuse—and it often results in direct savings to the taxpayer. Eliminating duplication and inefficiency can translate into real savings in both the short-term and the long-term. That is one of the special benefits of the good work that our committee does.

Let me close with this. As the primary investigative committee of the House of Representatives, the Oversight Committee has one of the broadest jurisdictions of any committee in Congress. We are charged with conducting robust and responsible oversight of the entire federal government—and beyond.

We are not only conducting robust and responsible oversight of the Executive Branch and this Administration. We are also overseeing ONDCP's efforts to combat the opioid crisis that claimed more than 70,000 souls last year. We are conducting hearings on the upcoming census next year, which is facing extremely significant challenges. We are working on bipartisan legislation to address the financial troubles at the Postal Service. And we are investigating the skyrocketing prices of prescription drugs, which affect nearly every family in America.

Beginning the process of restoring the Oversight Committee's funding will send a strong signal that the House of Representatives is taking seriously its oversight responsibilities under the Constitution. It will also help ensure that our government is working effectively and efficiently on behalf of the American people.

Thank you again for considering this request, and I stand ready to answer any questions that you may have.