



## Politico: Elijah Cummings Is Ready to Investigate Trump

If Democrats retake the House, the Maryland congressman will likely become the new chair of the Oversight Committee. Here, a preview of what to expect.

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**Podcast Audio:** <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/politicos-off-message/id987591126?mt=2>

October 02, 2018

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Elijah Cummings says he doesn't have a lot of patience, and he has even less trust.

To him, President Donald Trump "is a person [who] calls a lie 'the truth' and the truth 'a lie.'" He thinks the president violates the Constitution's emoluments clause daily, and sees an abnormal tolerance for corruption and misconduct emanating straight out of the Oval Office. And, in the eyes of the 67-year-old Democrat, just as troubling is the notion that Congress has fallen flat on its Constitutional duty to check the administration.

Expect that to change if Democrats retake the House in November. Then, the Baltimore congressman is set to become the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, giving him subpoena power and the ability to call as many hearings as he wants on whichever topics he chooses.

In light of everything he's learned about Trump—and especially after Senate testimony last week by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, which Cummings saw as dishonest—the congressman doubts he'll be able to believe any denial from anyone in the administration, regardless of whether they're under oath, he said in an interview for [POLITICO's Off Message podcast](#).

“Oh no, no. Uh-uh. No,” Cummings said. “I worry more about getting documents. If I can get documents, it doesn't matter.”

Excited by the polls, Democrats have been fantasizing about all the investigations they'll launch when they control Congress, the way they'll swamp the White House with more requests than an staff that's already stretched-thin—one likely to see more departures after November—will be able to handle.

Cummings is prepping targets—from the security clearances of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, to digging into how former EPA chief Scott Pruitt was able to keep his job for so long—and the list is getting longer by the week.

Just last week, he says, he added to it the the Senate Judiciary Committee staff's claims—made without further detail—that two men had separately come forward to each claim responsibility for sexually assaulting Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, the woman who has alleged Kavanaugh assaulted her as a teenager.

“I want to find out,” Cummings said. “Did [the staff] have someone who came—or two people—who came and admitted a crime, and what did they do about it? What are their names? Who are they? I'd like for them to come before us and let us know what they did and when they did it and how they did it.”

He jokes that watching the Judiciary Committee hearings is the only time he wishes he had run for Senate, as he'd looked at doing for the seat that his former colleague Chris Van Hollen won in 2016.

After a year of health problems that had him laid up in the hospital for six months after heart surgery—and still using a walker and a cane to recover from a knee injury—Cummings says his new sense of mortality has shot through his approach to the job.

“Let's cut through the unnecessary BS, and let's get to the facts—and I do not want anybody wasting my time. Nor do I want to waste the time of my committee members, or my family members,” Cummings said. “And I damn sure don't want to waste my time.”

Cummings is a private man. Staffers who've known him for years don't know basic details of his personal life, the result of a clear division he draws between his family time and government work. He doesn't do many interviews. He's been in politics for 35 years, in Congress representing Baltimore since 1996. Most Sundays, he's in church instead of working the TV show circuit. He's a proud member of the Congressional Black Caucus and has been since he got to Washington, but he's deliberately not defined himself as a *black* leader in Congress. He's better known for burrowing down into committee work and gaining friends in every pocket of the caucus, including a number of Republicans—a fact which has some people thinking he could wind up as speaker of the House if Nancy Pelosi stumbles.

But even if she doesn't, if Democrats take the House, Cummings will be one of the three most important committee chairs going up against the White House, along with California's Adam Schiff on Intelligence, managing the Russia probe, and New York's Jerry Nadler on Judiciary, trying to thread the needle on a response to those calls for Trump's impeachment.

"He will not be bashful. He will be aggressive," said Jason Chaffetz, the former Utah GOP congressman who chaired the Oversight committee with Cummings as its ranking member. "And I'll probably disagree with everything he does."

Chaffetz pointed out that Cummings, despite his friendship with President Barack Obama, co-signed 300 letters from the committee to provide oversight of the Obama administration. But Chaffetz warned that House Democrats may be overestimating how much they'll be able to get out of a reluctant White House, and argued that they would have been better off joining with Republicans to demand intelligence information that the administration was trying to keep secret.

"If [North Carolina Rep.] Mark Meadows and [Ohio Rep.] Jim Jordan can't get documents out of the White House, I don't know why Elijah Cummings and the Democrats think they'll do any better," Chaffetz said.

Sit down with Cummings for a while, and the frustration comes out, punctuated with the occasional "come on, now!" He's still annoyed about what happened after he approached Trump at the post-inauguration luncheon to say they could work together on lowering prescription drug prices: Trump invited Cummings to the White House, the two had a good meeting, and then Cummings heard the president publicly crediting Cummings with saying that Trump would "go down as one of the great presidents." (Cummings says the statement was surrounded by a lot of caveats and "if" statements, none of which Trump has fulfilled).

It's not just that the president obviously misrepresented him, Cummings said, and that his takeaway from the experience is "I have to really be careful if I ever talk to him or meet with him, I have to have somebody present, to be a witness." The bigger frustration is that he hasn't heard from the White House for close to a year about the prescription drug prices that Cummings says are costing people their lives—and which Trump said he cared about.

He's particularly offended by the GOP approach to voting rights. Where are the Republicans willing to revise the Voting Rights Act, he asks, as the Supreme Court suggested Congress do in its decision striking down a key section of it in 2014?

He thinks about his mother, who died in February at age 92, born a sharecropper in South Carolina, just like his father, and who came to still-segregated Baltimore in the 1940s looking for something better.

"My mother, on her dying bed, the last thing she said to me was, 'Do not let them take away our right to vote.' And then she died. Why? Because she had seen the pain that people had gone through to get the vote, what it meant to see for her," Cummings said.

He's a collaborative person. He makes actual friendships across the aisle. He doesn't throw flames just for the sake of it.

Not on this.

“I don’t see how somebody there—a Republican—can go and say, ‘I’m your friend,’” he said. “You’re not my friend. How can you be my friend when you won’t even let me control my own destiny? How can you be my friend?”

Still, Cummings said, he doesn’t think he’ll have a hard time working the balance between Democrats who’ll insist that no matter how many investigations he launches that he’s not doing enough, and Republicans who’ll insist that no matter how tight a grip he keeps on them, that he’s overreaching.

“I tell my constituents, ‘We are in a storm. It’s a big storm. It’s called the Trump storm,’” Cummings said. “The question is not whether the storm will end, but ‘Where will you be? What will you have? Will you be living when that storm ends?’ That’s the question. So, in the meantime, we