

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 26, 2017

General John F. Kelly
Chief of Staff
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear General Kelly:

We are writing to request information about troubling reports that the Trump Administration—and specifically officials in the White House—may have suppressed an internal study highlighting the tremendously positive net economic contributions of refugees.

Our nation's public policies should be based on a thorough understanding of empirical facts and data, but if these recent reports are true, it appears that the Trump Administration may have rejected these facts in order to present a biased, incomplete, and ultimately false political narrative. It is critical for Congress and the American people to understand who in the Trump Administration engaged in these actions and why.

On September 18, 2017, the *New York Times* reported:

Trump administration officials, under pressure from the White House to provide a rationale for reducing the number of refugees allowed into the United States next year, rejected a study by the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] that found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in government revenues over the past decade than they cost.¹

The *Times* later posted a copy of the report itself, which concluded:

Overall, this report estimated that the net fiscal impact of refugees was positive over the 10-year period, at \$63 billion, meaning they contributed more in revenue than they cost in expenditures.²

According to the *Times*:

¹ *Trump Administration Rejects Study Showing Positive Impact of Refugees*, New York Times (Sept. 18, 2017) (online at www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/us/politics/refugees-revenue-cost-report-trump.html?_r=0).

² Department of Health and Human Services, *The Fiscal Costs of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program at the Federal, State, and Local Levels, from 2005-2014* (July 29, 2017) (online at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4056060/Refugee-Report-Draft.pdf>).

White House officials said those conclusions were illegitimate and politically motivated, and were disproved by the final report issued by the agency, which asserts that the per-capita cost of a refugee is higher than that of an American.³

In fact, White House spokesman Raj Shah stated on the record:

The actual report pursuant to the presidential memorandum shows that refugees with few skills coming from war-torn countries take more government benefits from the Department of Health and Human Services than the average population, and are not a net benefit to the U.S. economy.⁴

Although the final report has not been released publicly, the *Times* reported that the Trump Administration achieved its skewed results by instead examining only expenditures by refugees while excluding all of their financial contributions:

The three-page report the agency ultimately submitted, dated Sept. 5, does just that, using government data to compare the costs of refugees to Americans and making no mention of revenues contributed by refugees.⁵

If this account is accurate, the Trump Administration's suppression of this draft report suggests an Orwellian dismissal of fact-based analysis in service of the worst kind of political pessimism. It also represents a potential violation of Section 207(e)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which requires the Administration to provide Congress with "an analysis of the anticipated social, *economic*, and demographic impact of [refugees]' admission to the United States."⁶

The American people deserve to know who directed and participated in these abuses and whether they were committed to provide illegitimate support to the Trump Administration's efforts to restrict the number of refugees entering the country.⁷

For all of these reasons, we request that you produce, by October 1, 2017, copies of the following documents:

- (a) all drafts of the report, including the final version completed in September 2017; and

³ *Trump Administration Rejects Study Showing Positive Impact of Refugees*, New York Times (Sept. 18, 2017) (online at www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/us/politics/refugees-revenue-cost-report-trump.html?_r=0).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 8 U.S.C. §1157(e)(4) (emphasis added).

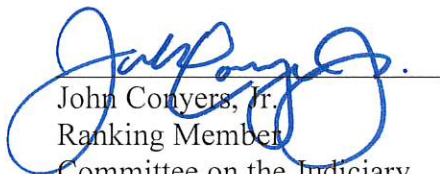
⁷ *Sessions: Obama's Syria Refugee Plan to Cost \$55 Billion, Demands it be Killed*, Washington Examiner (Nov. 16, 2015) (online at www.washingtonexaminer.com/sessions-obamas-syrian-refugee-plan-to-cost-55-billion-demands-it-be-killed/article/2576450); *Mike Pence's Refugee Problem*, Rolling Stone (Jan. 25, 2017) (online at www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/mike-pences-refugee-problem-w462763).

- (b) all communications referring or relating to any draft of this report, its contents, or its findings, including but not limited to communications between or among any federal officials, including officials at HHS, the White House, or any other federal agency, as well as communications between or among non-governmental entities or individuals.


We also request a briefing from appropriate White House officials by October 1, 2017, regarding: the findings in early versions of the report that were omitted in later versions; the criteria guiding those omissions; the offices and officials involved in producing the report, including any political staff that participated in any way in this process; the methodology underlying the report; and the specific rationale for excluding from the final report the significant economic benefits of refugees.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.


Sincerely,



John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration and
Border Security
Committee on the Judiciary



Stephen F. Lynch
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform

cc. The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform