

## House Oversight Democrats News Archives

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**May 2011**

### **POLITICO: May 24, 2011 - House GOP: W.H. intentionally trying to raise gas prices**

The Obama administration is "pursuing an agenda to raise the price Americans pay for energy," House Republicans charged in a report released late Monday — repeating an accusation they've made before, but this time laying it out in a 43-page document just ahead of what's likely to be a contentious hearing Tuesday morning.

But the GOP report came only after top committee Democrat Elijah Cummings launched a pre-emptive strike earlier Monday: a report of his own blaming speculators for the high prices and calling on the committee to shine its spotlight on Wall Street.

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### **REUTERS: May 23, 2011 - US House Dems urge limits on oil speculators**

The U.S. Congress should take steps to limit speculation in oil markets, which has boosted prices as much as 30 percent, a new report from the Democratic staff of a House of Representatives oversight committee said on Monday.

The report, based on data and comments from industry experts, cites comments from Exxon Mobil (XOM.N) CEO Rex Tillerson and others that oil should be around \$60-\$70 a barrel based on the fundamentals of supply and demand.

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### **DOWJONES: May 24, 2011 - Warren Defends US Consumer Bureau's Powers, Accountability**

White House adviser Elizabeth Warren, at a U.S. House hearing Tuesday, touted the new consumer watchdog agency as a vital financial markets cop, but skeptical Republican lawmakers criticized it as a superpowerful financial regulator with too few checks and balances.

Still, Democrats stood up for the agency that will have authority over credit card, mortgages and other financial products and argued that the bureau's powers pale in comparison to the financial industry's sway in Washington.

"The consumer bureau's budget is only about 1% of the amount banks generate just from late fees and overdraft fees," said Rep. Elijah Cummings (D, Md.). "How will you compete against the Goliath when you are so mismatched?" Cummings also praised Warren, saying "there are people in my district who applaud what you're doing."

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**LOS ANGELES TIMES: May 24, 2011 - Elizabeth Warren and House Republicans clash bitterly over new consumer agency**

House Republicans have been adamant since last year that they don't like the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau -- and it's also becoming apparent they don't like Elizabeth Warren, the Obama administration advisor who is helping launch the agency.

Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) jumped to Warren's defense, saying she should be treated fairly and allowed to leave to get to previously scheduled meetings. McHenry agreed when Warren offered to answer written questions from two remaining lawmakers.

Cummings praised Warren and the work she was doing setting up the consumer bureau. "There are people in my district who applaud what you are doing and may God bless you," Cummings said. "Stay on the battlefield."

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**WASHINGTON POST: May 17, 2011- Members of Congress call for probe of HUD's HOME affordable-housing program**

A bipartisan group of federal lawmakers is calling on Congress to probe the nation's housing-construction program for the poor, citing years-long delays and other breakdowns that

have thwarted the production of hundreds of affordable-housing projects.

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.), the ranking member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, also called for an investigation, sending a letter Tuesday to committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.).

A committee examination, Cummings wrote, “presents an opportunity for bipartisan and constructive oversight into the HOME program, the actions of developers who received U.S. taxpayer funds, and potential flaws in the block grant process that allegedly led to fraud, waste, and delay.”

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### **NATIONAL JOURNAL: May 13, 2011 - Issa Argues against Transparency Proposal for Federal Contractors**

At the beginning of Thursday's House Committee on Oversight and Government reform hearing, Chairman Darrell Issa, R-Calif., read a mission statement—one that he reads at the start of each hearing—declaring the need to account for how the government spends its money. Then he spent the hearing arguing against a draft proposal from President Obama that would call for more transparency from federal contractors.

It's not fair, Issa said, to put private citizens in the awkward position of having to disclose “deeply personal information”— like whether they support anti-abortion organizations or gay marriage legislation—that could be “detrimental to their careers.”

Ranking member Elijah Cummings, D-Md., said he thinks that logic is bunk.

"I never thought I would see the day where our committee would view transparency as the enemy," Cummings said at the hearing.

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### **THE HILL: May 12, 2011 - Democrats slam Issa for rejecting witness**

House Democrats say Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) has refused to allow one of their invited witnesses to testify at a hearing on Thursday.

Democrats on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee invited Fred Wertheimer, president of campaign finance watchdog Democracy 21, to testify at a joint hearing hosted by the Oversight panel and the House Small Business Committee. The two committees are looking into President Obama's draft executive order that would force government contractors to disclose their political contributions.

"It is deeply troubling that Chairman Issa refused to allow testimony from this coalition of independent experts," said Cummings in a statement. "Denying their testimony is a disservice to members of Congress and the public, and it tarnishes the integrity of the committee. Our committee should be a model for others to follow. Especially in a debate about openness and transparency, we should be open and transparent ourselves."

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**THE BALTIMORE SUN: May 12, 2011 - Cummings blasts GOP over federal contractor hearing**

Hours before a congressional hearing was set to begin Thursday on a White House proposal that would require federal contractors to disclose political donations Republicans and Democrats were heatedly arguing over the witness lineup.

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, the top-ranking Democrat on the committee, had invited Fred Wertheimer of the Washington-based watchdog group Democracy 21 to testify in support of the draft proposal, but said Thursday that Rep. Darrell Issa, the committee's GOP chairman, denied the request.

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**TALKING POINTS MEMO: May 12, 2011 - Issa Wouldn't Let Witness Testify In Favor Of Disclosure By Government Contractors**

House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA) refused a request Thursday from the ranking Democratic member, Elijah Cummings (D-MD), to allow the head of a government watchdog to testify in support of an executive order which would require government contractors to disclose more information about their political donations.

Wertheimer told TPM via email that Issa is allowing the Democrats on the Oversight Committee and House Small Business Committee to have a total of only one witness, so his testimony is

being submitted by the minority of the Oversight Committee for the hearing record.

"It is deeply troubling that Chairman Issa refused to allow testimony from this coalition of independent experts," Cummings said in a statement. "Denying their testimony is a disservice to Members of Congress and the public, and it tarnishes the integrity of the Committee. Our Committee should be a model for others to follow. Especially in a debate about openness and transparency, we should be open and transparent ourselves."

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### **THE HILL: May 12, 2011 - DC mayor pushes for budget autonomy**

Washington Mayor Vince Gray pleaded with Congress on Thursday to grant the District freedom to spend local funds as it sees fit and said the recent budget battles in Congress show more than ever that D.C. should be freed from the broken annual appropriations process.

Testifying before the House Oversight subcommittee that oversees D.C., Gray said the current appropriations process is costly to the District and opens it to the risk of a government shutdown such as that which almost occurred in April due to wrangling between Democrats and Republicans.

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), in a prepared statement, said the oversight hearing was unprecedented since the Appropriations Committee normally handles the D.C. budget alone. She decried the fact that the new Congress is interfering more in D.C. affairs.

She pointed out the 2011 spending-cut compromise, which in the end prevented D.C. from spending local funds on abortion.

“In fact, the House Republican majority has spent more time focusing on the local affairs of the District than at any time since the 1973 Home Rule Act,” Norton said.

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## **THE HILL: May 12, 2011 - When did sunlight become the infectant?**

By Rep. Elijah E. Cummings

Reality seems to have been flipped on its head in the debate over the administration’s draft executive order to require federal contractors to disclose more information about their campaign contributions.

It used to be that transparency was a solution, not a problem. But today, Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa is holding a hearing stacked with witnesses representing defense and aerospace contractors who oppose additional disclosure.

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**POLITICO: May 10, 2011- Cummings: Issa hearing one sided**

Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) is pushing back against a Republican attack on a controversial White House proposal that conservatives allege is an attempt to intimidate administration critics.

On Tuesday, Cummings, the ranking Democrat on Issa's committee, responded with a letter to Issa suggesting that the hearing is basically a political stunt, urging Issa to balance out a witness list loaded with likely critics of the measure with supporters.

'The witnesses you have invited,' Cummings wrote, 'appear to represent only one side of the debate. I am concerned that such an unbalanced approach would not provide members an accurate or complete understanding of this issue,' Cummings wrote, urging Issa to invite Fred Wertheimer, president of Democracy 21, a group that supports stricter campaign finance regulations, and that recently urged President Barack Obama to sign the executive order.

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**REUTERS: May 10, 2011- SEC chief keeps options open on private securities**

The top U.S. securities regulator pledged a rigorous review of potentially outdated private securities trading rules, but stopped short of endorsing changes being advocated by Republican

lawmakers.

Some Democrats on the panel expressed caution about tinkering with rules designed to protect investors.

"I fully support helping U.S. firms access additional capital, but I also believe this must be done without sacrificing critical protections," said the Elijah Cummings, the committee's top Democrat.

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### **AP: May 10, 2011- SEC Chief: New Stock Rules Must Protect Investors**

The head of the Securities and Exchange Commission says the agency is open to easing rules for private companies that issue stock. But it must first weigh the benefits of those changes against a potential rise in fraudulent stock offerings.

Schapiro said she's sympathetic to businesses' complaint that the current limit restricts their ability to raise capital. But she and her staff said looser requirements could also lead to more cases of phony companies scamming investors.

The most important goal is "getting this balance right between protecting investors and making access to capital affordable and efficient," Schapiro told the panel.

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**Politico: May 3, 2011- Private White House tweets, emails, Facebook posts targeted**

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) stressed Tuesday that he remains concerned that White House officials' personal emails, text messages, Facebook posts and tweets are not being archived in the spirit of federal law.

Throughout the hearing, ranking member Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) repeatedly urged Issa to consider his legislation from last year. The effort would modernize the record collection, while taking on related side issues — such as boosting the power of the Government Accountability Office and ensuring "donations to presidential libraries are part of the public record."

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**AP: May 3, 2011- Some White House records may not be preserved**

The nation's archivist said Tuesday he is uncomfortable with allowing White House staff members to decide whether their tweets, emails and Facebook messages from personal accounts are work-related and must be saved.

The ranking committee Democrat, Elijah Cummings of Maryland, urged Issa to rejuvenate a bill designed to ensure that presidential records are made public in a timely manner. It would require current and former presidents to raise any objections to release of records within 90 days of notification that a Freedom of Information request had been submitted.

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### April 2011

#### **CBS EVENING NEWS: April 14, 2011 - Walker defends Wis. collective bargaining law, calls it "progressive"**

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker on Thursday defended the Wisconsin "budget repair" law stripping public workers of most of their collective bargaining rights, arguing that the legislation was "progressive, in the best sense of the word." Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) took aim at Walker's position on union rights, and argued that, contrary to the governor's statements, the recent legislation would hurt middle-class workers, not help them.

"I strongly oppose efforts to falsely blame middle-class American workers for these current economic problems," said Cummings, the ranking Democrat on the committee. "This recession

was not caused by them. Working America - firefighters, teachers and nurses - are not responsible for the reckless actions of Wall Street, which led to this crisis in the first place."

Rep. Dennis Kucinich, an Ohio Democrat, challenged Walker on the how "repealing collective bargaining rights for public workers shows us anything about state debt." "Your proposal would require unions to hold annual votes to continue representing their own members," Kucinich said. "Can you please explain to me how much money this provision saves for your state budget?" "That particular part doesn't save any," Walker responded, after being pressed on the matter.

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### **WALL STREET JOURNAL: April 14, 2011 - Gov. Walker Gets Some Awkward Questions**

□ Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker faced some awkward questions during his much-anticipated testimony Thursday before the House Oversight Committee., Chairman Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.) had intended the hearing to focus on state and municipal debt, but some Democratic lawmakers had other issues they wanted to air with the new Republican governor, who gained national attention with his effort to cut state costs by limiting collective bargaining for public employees.

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### **MSNBC: April 14, 2011 - Kucinich blasts Gov. Walker at Hill panel**

In a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing exploring state and municipal debt, Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) challenged Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) to admit his legislative campaign aimed at stripping public employees' collective bargaining rights did nothing to help solve his state's budget deficit.

"If the unions agreed to the financial cuts you demand," Kucinich told Walker, "I don't understand how repealing collective bargaining rights for public workers shows us anything about state debt."

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### **FOX NEWS: April 14, 2011 - Hill Democrats Bash Walker for Wisconsin Union Law**

Thursday's hearing before the House Oversight Committee was billed as a look at the tough budgetary choices states are facing, and who better to testify than Gov. Scott Walker, R-Wis. But, it was quickly apparent that most of the Democratic lawmakers on the Committee wanted to talk about something else entirely – namely Walker's controversial legislation that would limit public employees' collective bargaining power and require them to contribute more to their benefit plans. Ranking Member Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., wasted no time.

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### **NEW YORK TIMES: April 12, 2011 - Rules for Mortgage Servicers Are Criticized as Ineffective**

Fourteen mortgage servicers have signed consent orders with the [Office of the Comptroller of the Currency](#) and other regulators, promising to improve their processing systems and to treat delinquent borrowers better. The agreements with the servicers, which include [Bank of America](#)

,  
[Wells Fargo](#)

[JPMorgan Chase](#)

and

[GMAC](#)

, will be executed as early as this week.

Adding to the already widespread criticism of the measures, the ranking minority member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform formally asked regulators on Tuesday to put them off. Representative Elijah Cummings, a Democrat from Maryland, said in a letter to the comptroller's office that he was "deeply concerned" that the consent orders "would allow mortgage servicers to continue disregarding their legal and contractual obligations." Mr. Cummings said in an interview that he wanted the regulators to regroup and do a better job. A spokesman for the comptroller's office declined comment.

House Democratic members plan to introduce legislation on Wednesday that offers what they say is a better fix. The Preserving Homes and Communities Act of 2011, which was introduced in the Senate last month, would require lenders to evaluate homeowners for modifications before initiating foreclosure, create an appeals process for those who are denied modifications, place limits on foreclosure-related fees and require servicers to prove they have the legal right to foreclose.

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**March 2011**

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**AP: March 31, 2011 - Republicans grill DHS officials on FOIA delays**

House Republicans grilled senior officials from the Homeland Security Department on Thursday over the agency's now-rescinded practice of requiring secretive reviews by political advisers of hundreds of requests for government files under the Freedom of Information Act.

The top lawyer at the Homeland Security Department, Ivan Fong, said parts of the investigative report by congressional Republicans were "irresponsible" and made him indignant. The 153-page report accused the department of "administrative incompetence, illegal politicization and official obstruction."

Rep. Elijah Cummings, the top Democrat on the panel, cited results from an inquiry by the Homeland Security inspector general that found no evidence that political advisers prohibited federal records from being disclosed. The report also concluded that the advisers "had little to contribute" and caused unnecessary delays that violated deadlines under the law.

The department abandoned its practice of requiring approval by political appointees before information could be released after the AP investigated the program last year. Since July, political advisers have been afforded three business days to object to the release of information that otherwise could be withheld under nine narrow provisions in the law protecting national security, privacy or confidential decision-making. If there are no objections, the records can be released.

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**THE HILL: March 31, 2011 - DHS, Dems fend off Oversight chairman's claims on info release**

Tempers flared and accusations were hurled on Thursday at a House Oversight Committee hearing into whether the Obama administration allowed political appointees to block the release of information.

The department's chief privacy officer, Mary Ellen Callahan, testified that the privacy office had experienced management challenges over the past two years. But she said it had made significant headway on the backlog of Freedom Of Information Act requests and never allowed political appointees to restrict the release of information.

Rep. Elijah Cummings (Md.), the ranking Democrat on the panel, said Issa's "extreme accusations" were "unsubstantiated." He said that when Democratic staff reviewed the thousands of documents and the six interviews the panel had gathered and conducted with DHS officials, "we found no evidence that DHS withheld any information for partisan political purposes."

"Over and over again you claimed that DHS officials are making FOIA decisions based on partisan political considerations ... even though the committee has conducted interviews and gathered documents that show the opposite to be true," Cummings said.

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**WASHINGTON POST: March 30, 2011 - House likely to approve D.C. school choice bill, but future in limbo**

The House is expected to approve a bill Wednesday afternoon that would revive and expand the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, as President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) stake out opposing sides on the school choice plan.

Under the program, which began in 2004, low-income District students are given federal money to help pay for private school tuition.

Democrats closed the program to new entrants in 2009. But Boehner's bill – known as the SOAR Act – would reopen it, offering \$20 million annually for five years for new scholarships, along with another \$20 million apiece for D.C. charter schools and traditional D.C. public schools.

But Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), who will lead the opposition to the bill on the House floor, said the voucher program steers money to a tiny percentage of District students while ignoring the city school system's broader needs. The Washington Teachers Union opposes the measure for the same reason.

"Our highest priority must be to use limited taxpayer dollars to support programs that will truly meet all of our children's educational needs. This bill does not do that," Cummings said.

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### **POLITICO - March 28, 2011 - Dems: Darrell Issa bloated Julius Genachowski's visits**

Democrats on the House oversight committee accused the panel's GOP chairman of inflating the number of White House visits made by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski to suggest the Obama administration meddled in the development of net neutrality policy. According to the latest Democratic analysis of the meetings, obtained by POLITICO, Genachowski made only 34 visits to the White House between January 2009 and November 2010.

That's far shy of the 81 visits Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Darrell Issa

(R-Calif.) cited in a letter to Genachowski last week. In the letter, Issa asked the FCC chairman to turn over documents as part of a Republican investigation into White House influence peddling in the FCC net rules. "Any way you cut it, the claim that Genachowski visited the White House 81 times is a mischaracterization," according to the analysis.

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### **THE HILL - March 29, 2011 - Republicans Won't Let Frank Testify**

Republicans in charge of the House Oversight Committee have rejected a request from Democrats to have Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) testify at a hearing on the financial reform law that bears his name.

Reps. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) and Mike Quigley (D-Ill.) asked on March 25 for Frank to testify at Wednesday's hearing on the Dodd-Frank financial reform law, which will explore whether the bill prevents financial firms from believing they are "too big to fail." Cummings is the ranking member of the committee, while Quigley is the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee that is holding the hearing.

They argued that as one of the primary authors of the law, Frank could provide "valuable

insight" on Dodd-Frank and its impact on financial markets. They added that Frank said he would be willing to testify. But in a response dated March 28, Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-N.C.), the subcommittee chairman, informed the lawmakers that Frank would not be allowed to testify. Copies of the letters were obtained by The Hill.

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