

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<http://oversight.house.gov>

May 24, 2018

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We are writing to request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) review the actions of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) under the Trump Administration.

Our country is in the midst of the worst public health crisis we have faced in 30 years. Each day, 115 Americans lose their lives to opioid overdoses. In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that life expectancy in the United States had dropped for the second year in the row, and drug overdoses are the single biggest reason why.¹

The Trump Administration has displayed a concerning failure of leadership in addressing the opioid crisis. Under the previous authorizing statute, the ONDCP has been required to issue a National Drug Control Strategy by February 1st of each year.² To date, the Trump Administration has yet to issue a strategy—16 months into the President's term. Further, it has come to our attention that the ONDCP has continued to certify the adequacy of Drug Control Program agency budgets, despite indications that these budgets are no longer in fact sufficient to meet the requirements of the legacy National Drug Control Strategy.

In addition, the ONDCP has gone without a permanent Director since the beginning of the Trump Administration. After President Trump's initial nominee withdrew from consideration in October 2017, the President failed to formally nominate a permanent Director to

¹ *Life Expectancy Is Down for a Second Year. Drug Overdoses Are a Big Reason Why*, USA Today (Dec. 21, 2017) (online at www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/12/21/u-s-life-expectancy-drops-second-year-drug-deaths-spike-cdc/970283001/); U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Mortality in the United States, 2016* (Dec. 2016) (online at www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db293.htm).

² Pub. L. 109-469.

fill the position until just last month.³ Meanwhile, the qualifications of Administration officials that have been appointed to senior positions in the Office have been called into question.⁴

In light of these concerning actions, we ask that GAO conduct a review of the following issues:

- (1) the effect that the lack of a current National Drug Control Strategy has had on:
 - (a) efforts made in 2017 and 2018 to reduce the demand for and supply of illegal drugs; and
 - (b) efforts to respond to the Public Health Emergency declared by President Trump on October 26, 2017, under Section 319 of the Public Health Service Act;
- (2) the extent to which the ONDCP has confirmed the adequacy of budget requests or certified the adequacy of budget submissions under 21 U.S.C. § 1703 that ONDCP officials assess are inadequate to achieve the goals of the existing National Drug Control Strategy or to achieve meaningful reductions in the demand for or supply of illegal drugs; and
- (3) the effect that the absence of a Director at the ONDCP who has been confirmed by the Senate has had on efforts to reduce the demand for and supply of illegal drugs in the United States.

Sincerely,



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman

³ *President Donald J. Trump Announces Intent to Nominate Personnel to Key Administration Post*, The White House (Apr. 23, 2018) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-announces-intent-nominate-personnel-key-administration-post-3/).

⁴ *Trump's 24-Year-Old Drug Policy Appointee to Step Down by Month's End*, Washington Post (Jan. 24, 2018) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/trumps-24-year-old-drug-policy-appointee-to-step-down-by-months-end/2018/01/24/77ce5656-0159-11e8-8acf-ad2991367d9d_story.html).