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Democrats Flip the House: Incoming Committee Chairs and Oversight Priorities

Client Alerts

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Voters across the country made their voices heard at the polls on Tuesday. Democrats have won the House, and their stated priorities of investigating allegations of corruption and the causes of affordability challenges will take center stage in the next Congress.

House Democrats have said they will release an agenda in the first 100 hours after being seated in January, and that their ambitious 100-day plan will include reinstating the Affordable Care Act subsidies, reversing Medicaid cuts, voting to end the Iran war, undoing certain tariffs, and of course, pursuing an aggressive oversight campaign. The accountability messaging from Democratic campaigns across the country will evolve into a coordinated multicommittee oversight effort. This alert covers what clients need to know about the likely incoming leaders at key committees across the House.

House Democrats' Oversight Agenda for the 120th Congress

House Oversight Priorities: Corruption, Costs, and Care

Expect an agenda built around three prongs: corruption, costs, and care. House Democratic Whip Katherine Clark (D-MA) has described the party's focus as lowering costs, protecting health care, and holding the "crooks" accountable, setting up Democrats as the answer to Republican "chaos and corruption and cruelty." Clark has also said a Democratic House would still work with the White House where it can, meaning hearings and investigations will run alongside cost-focused legislation rather than replace it.

Democrats are also reportedly considering a select committee on AI in the next Congress, which would both expand oversight powers to scrutinize the tech industry and build opportunities for bipartisan investigations as both parties continue to advocate for greater AI regulation. Such a panel would need to be created by a full House vote. Rep. Lori Trahan (D-MA), who has called for high-profile hearings with tech CEOs, is one name to watch as a possible chair. Democratic leadership will have to persuade the leaders of the committees of jurisdiction to cede to the select committee; incoming Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Frank Pallone, for example, opposes a select committee and expressed concern that creating a select committee would "further delay the legislative process."

House Subpoena Authority Under Rule XI

Under the House rules in effect now, every standing committee has subpoena authority under House Rule XI, and each can delegate the power to its chair through its own committee rules. These rules are set at the start of each Congress, so the incoming majority could change the rules in the new package adopted in January 2027. Each committee then adopts its own rules on the specifics, including whether and under what circumstances the chair must notify or consult the ranking member before serving a subpoena, how much advance notice is required, and whether a full committee vote is needed. Individual committee rules for the 120th Congress will be finalized when committees are organized in January and February, and any changes to the subpoena guidelines in the House Rules package will signal the majority's strategy for conducting oversight during the next two years.

How House Committee Leaders Are Chosen

House chairs and ranking members are selected by each party's steering committee. The chair controls the committee agenda, the hearing calendar, and in most cases, subpoenas. The Republican Conference caps committee leadership terms at six years, while the Democratic Caucus has no term limits on top committee posts.

Key House Committees and Their Likely Leaders

Based on public reporting and our congressional team's assessment, here are the most likely committee leaders and the races to watch in the House:

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Oversight and Government Reform Committee can investigate subjects within its own legislative jurisdiction as well as "any matter" within the jurisdiction of the other standing House committees. Incoming Chair Robert Garcia (D-CA) responded to the House's shift in power with a clear and succinct message: "lawyer up."

Chair: Representative Robert Garcia (D-CA) is the incoming chair. A frequent presence on cable news, he won the top Democratic Ranking Member slot 150–63 in only his second term. Top priorities include Jeffrey Epstein, Trump family business dealings, allegations of DHS pay-to-play, immigration enforcement (specifically under Kristi Noem's tenure), corruption allegations, HHS's vaccination policy, and DOGE-driven workforce cuts. He has warned that companies the Committee views as aiding the Administration's alleged corruption or steering money to the Trump family should expect scrutiny. He is also coordinating with Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD), the anticipated Judiciary Chair, on a broad oversight campaign aimed at President Trump, his family and the Administration. He is expected to hold high-profile hearings.

Ranking Member: There is no clear front-runner. Representative James Comer (R-KY) is term-limited and not seeking a waiver to continue to lead Committee Republicans in the 120th Congress. Representative Pat Fallon (R-TX) has formally declared his campaign to succeed Chairman Comer, and Representative Brandon Gill (R-TX) is also seeking the top Republican slot. Rep. Gill has the

backing of key leaders in the Republican caucus, including Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN). Gill has gained viral acclaim among the Republican base for his efforts to investigate DEI policies as the Chair of the Task Force on Defending Constitutional Rights and Exposing Institutional Abuses. Representatives Pete Sessions (R-TX) and Tim Burchett (R-TN) are also weighing runs. The White House may urge conference leaders to appoint an aggressive ranking member to lead the defense of the White House in response to Rep. Garcia's agenda.

House Judiciary Committee
The Judiciary Committee has jurisdiction over federal courts and judges, criminal law enforcement, immigration policy, civil liberties, antitrust, and intellectual property.

Chair: Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) will be the chair. A longtime oversight leader, constitutional law professor, and former Trump impeachment manager, he will focus the committee on investigations tied to the Justice Department and FBI, presidential pardons, immigration policy, antitrust and Big Tech, the Trump family, and entities that have cooperated with the Administration. Raskin has stated his top investigative priorities are alleged systems of bribery, kickbacks, and financial corruption, as well as the weaponization of the Department of Justice. He is expected to hold high-profile hearings.

Ranking Member: There is no clear front-runner. The current chairman, Representative Jim Jordan (R-OH), is term-limited and not seeking a waiver to lead Republicans in the 120th Congress. Wisconsin Representative Scott Fitzgerald (R-WI) has declared he will run for the top GOP spot on the Judiciary Committee—he is one of the most senior members who will return to the Committee next year. Representative Laurel Lee (R-FL), a former judge and Florida secretary of state, has announced she is running. While she is not among the most senior GOP committee members, several Republicans with more seniority (i.e., Representatives Darrell Issa, Andy Biggs, Thomas Massie, and Chip Roy) will not be returning to Congress next year.

House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Energy and Commerce Committee is responsible for matters including telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety, public health and research, environmental quality, energy policy, and interstate and foreign commerce, among others.

Chair: Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ), known as a moderate and policy-driven member, is the presumptive committee chair, who previously chaired the committee in the 116th and 117th Congresses. Data centers are a top issue for Pallone, who has already promised a crackdown that will include pollution rules and ratepayer protections and has gone so far as to call for a federal pause on data center construction. Other priorities include health care (i.e. PBMs, pharmaceutical companies, Medicare/Medicaid, Medicare Advantage, vaccine policies), telecommunications, and consumer protection issues like algorithmic pricing. He will also continue to investigate the Trump Administration's drug pricing deals with pharmaceutical companies, having already asked the GAO to review TrumpRx and pushed for details on the Administration's "most favored nation" agreements.

Ranking Member: Outgoing Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY), who has served one term as chair, is expected to become Ranking Member.

House Financial Services Committee
The Financial Services Committee has jurisdiction over banking and monetary policy, securities and exchanges, insurance, housing, and international finance.

Chair: Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) is the presumptive chair; she previously held the Committee gavel during the 116th and 117th Congresses. She has shored up her position against challengers including Representative Sean Casten (D-IL), who announced a run for the top Democratic slot, and possible others. If Waters holds the gavel, expect the Committee to focus on the Trump family's crypto investments, CFPB enforcement, and oversight of the banking industry and the independence of prudential regulators. Other consumer-focused priorities could include fraud and scams on P2P platforms and housing affordability. Waters previously used her gavel power to call the CEOs of the largest US banks to testify on a range of issues, and is widely expected to do so again. Democrats, including Waters, may pivot away from crypto market-structure legislation and toward oversight of the industry.

Ranking Member: Representative French Hill (R-AR), the outgoing chair, is expected to take over as Ranking Member, assuming he wins reelection (which is not a certainty as of this writing). The next most senior Republican members are Bill Huizenga (R-MI), who is also in a race too close to call, and Mike Haridopolos (R-FL).

House Ways & Means Committee
The House Ways & Means Committee has jurisdiction over taxes and other revenue measures, tariffs and trade agreements, Social Security, and a large share of health care policy.

Chair: Representative Richard Neal (D-MA) is the presumptive chair and previously led the committee in the 116th and 117th Congresses. Neal confirmed he has been laying groundwork for an agenda covering taxes, trade, health care, and Social Security. Oversight targets include allegations of Administration and Trump family-related corruption, Trump's $10 billion lawsuit against the IRS, taxes on the wealthy, renewable energy tax credits, allegations of the IRS sharing taxpayer data with DHS, the unclear day-to-day role of Frank Bisignano as IRS CEO, and the fallout from last year's IRS workforce cuts. Neal is also expected to scrutinize companies that sought tariff relief through trade deals and be part of efforts that seek to roll back tariffs for targeted industries.

Ranking Member: Outgoing Chair Jason Smith (R-MO), chair since January 2023, has not reached the three-term limit and is likely to be the top Republican.

House Education and Workforce Committee
The Education and Workforce Committee has jurisdiction over education from early childhood through higher education, workforce development and job training, and labor policy, including wages and workplace protections.

Chair: Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) is the outgoing Ranking Member and the frontrunner for chair; Scott previously chaired the Committee during the 116th and 117th Congresses. Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT), former National Teacher of the Year, has said she is considering a run for chair, while Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) has declared she would run for the spot. If Scott holds the power to set the agenda for the Committee, he will likely focus on K-12 policy and conduct oversight of the Trump Administration's dismantling of the Department of Education. Other targets would include cuts to federal education research, student loans, labor and pensions, the role of AI in the workforce, the Administration's handling of civil rights enforcement, gun violence, and child nutrition.

Ranking Member: The outgoing Chair Tim Walberg (R-MI) is expected to become Ranking Member.

House Homeland Security Committee

The Homeland Security Committee has jurisdiction over homeland security policy and the organization, administration, and management of the Department of Homeland Security.

Chair: Former January 6 Select Committee Chair and ICE critic Bennie Thompson (D-MS) will chair the Committee. His priorities focus on ICE accountability and enforcement tactics, allegations of DHS self-dealing, cuts made to the government workforce, and detention center oversight. Democrats on the committee are planning to look at allegations that DHS under Secretary Markwayne Mullin has failed to deploy body cameras to many immigration agents and to scrutinize conditions at immigration facilities. Expect lower-level and former officials to be brought in for testimony, with a possible high-profile hearing with senior officials, including Mullin.

Ranking Member: Current Chair Andrew Garbarino (R-NY) has not reached his Republican leadership term limit and is expected to become Ranking Member, though his race has not been called yet. The next most senior Republican member is Michael Guest (R-MS).

House Natural Resources Committee

The Natural Resources Committee has jurisdiction over public lands, national parks, fisheries and wildlife, mining and mineral resources on public lands, irrigation and reclamation, and Native American and insular affairs.

Chair: Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) is the presumptive committee chair. A sharp critic of the Administration, Huffman has used committee hearings, letters, and reports to level accusations of corruption. He focused his time as ranking member on blocking offshore drilling, opposing drilling on public lands, pushing for an inquiry into foreign-controlled companies mining on public land, and probing donations to Freedom 250.

Ranking Member: There is no clear anticipated ranking member. Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AR) has reached the term limit and is not seeking a waiver. Representative Pete Stauber (R-MN) has announced his run for the top GOP spot, but other senior GOP members include Tom McClintock (R-CA) and Paul Gosar (R-AZ).

House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party

The Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the US and the Chinese Communist Party investigates and makes policy recommendations on the Chinese Communist Party's economic, technological, and security progress and its competition with the United States, but it has no authority of its own to move legislation. Select committees get their authority from the resolution that creates them; thus, the House must vote to renew this committee in the new Congress, and it is unclear whether Democratic leadership will do so.

Chair: If this committee continues, Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA) is the presumptive chair. A staunch progressive with a high media profile, Khanna has used this select committee to promote economic patriotism, pushed a US-China AI safety agreement, and scrutinized Trump's dealings with Xi. While scrutiny on private entities will continue, we do not expect the overall tenure and focus of the committee to drastically shift compared to the previous Congress. Khanna has stated he is considering a run for the White House in 2028, meaning his work on the China committee could double as a national platform, with AI safety and domestic manufacturing serving as both policy priorities and early campaign themes. Oversight priorities will likely include scrutiny of Chinese investment in US firms, pushing for a US-China agreement on AI safety and AI chips, securing biotech and medical supply chains, and critical minerals.

Ranking Member: Representative John Moolenaar (R-MI) is anticipated to go from Chair to Ranking Member if the Select Committee is renewed in the 120th Congress.

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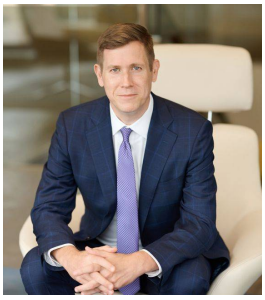
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