

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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July 20, 2018

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

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The nation continues to grapple with the ever-evolving and devastating opioid crisis. The staggering number of deaths due to opioids, including heroin and fentanyl, is steadily rising. In 2016, nearly 64,000 people died from a drug overdose,¹ with more than 42,000 of those deaths involving an opioid.² The House recently passed numerous bipartisan bills aimed at combating this crisis, including H.R. 5925, which reauthorizes the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).³

Since 2009, despite a statutory deadline of February 1, the timing of the annual National Drug Control Strategy (Strategy) has become less predictable. The 2009 Strategy was issued on January 15, 2009, prior to the presidential transition.⁴ The Obama administration's inaugural strategy was issued in May of the second year of the presidential term.⁵ Subsequent strategies were issued in April, July, and, in 2015, November.⁶ No annual strategy was issued during the

¹ U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Serv., Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *Understanding the Epidemic*, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>.

² U.S. Dep't of Health & Human Serv., Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *Opioid Overdose*, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>.

³ H.R. 5925, 115th Congress (2018).

⁴ EXEC. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY 2009, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/policy-and-research/2009ndcs.pdf> (last visited July 3, 2018); Press Release, The White House, *Message to the Congress of the United States*, (Jan. 15, 2009), available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2009/01/20090115-7.html>.

⁵ Gil Kerlikowske, *Launching America's New Approach to the Drug Problem*, THE WHITE HOUSE, (May 11, 2010), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2010/05/10/launching-america-s-new-approach-drug-problem>.

⁶ GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-16-257T, OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY: LACK OF PROGRESS ON ACHIEVING NATIONAL STRATEGY GOALS (2015); Michael Botticelli, *National Blueprint for Drug Policy Reform Released Today in Roanoke, VA*, THE WHITE HOUSE, (July 9, 2014), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/07/09/national-blueprint-drug-policy-reform-released-today-roanoke-va>; Gil Kerlikowske, *Drug Policy Reform in Action: A 21st Century Approach*, THE WHITE HOUSE, (Apr. 24, 2013), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2013/04/24/drug-policy-reform-action-21st-century-approach>; Gil Kerlikowske, *The National Drug Control Strategy: From "Rethinking" to Reform*, THE WHITE HOUSE, (Apr. 22, 2012), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/04/23/national-drug->

calendar year of 2016. Prior to the most recent presidential transition, on January 11, 2017, the 2016 Strategy was finally issued.⁷ As of today, ONDCP has not issued a 2018 Strategy.

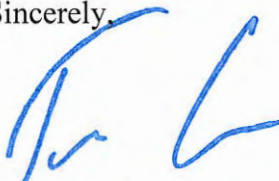
In addition to issuing the Strategy, ONDCP plays a significant role in reviewing the adequacy of budgets for National Drug Control Program agencies. Agencies are required to submit their National Drug Control budget requests to the Director of ONDCP, who reviews each proposed budget request to determine whether the requested funding is adequate to implement the objectives of the Strategy.⁸ After review, the Director will either offer recommendations to proposed budgets deemed inadequate or confirm the adequacy of proposed budget requests.⁹ Additionally, the Director certifies agency budget requests and has the authority to decertify an agency drug control budget submission.¹⁰

The Committee requests that GAO evaluate the impact of ONDCP on the opioid crisis, including:

1. The effect the National Drug Control Strategy has had on illicit and illegal drug supply and demand efforts from 2009-present, including the effect of increasingly delayed publication of the Strategy; and
2. The extent to which ONDCP has confirmed or certified the adequacy of budget requests and submissions under 21 U.S.C. § 1703 from 2009 to present.
3. The extent to which ONDCP has decertified an agency drug control budget submission under 21 U.S.C. § 1703 from 2009 to present.

Please contact Betsy Ferguson of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5074 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Trey Gowdy

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings

control-strategy-rethinking-reform; Gil Kerlikowske, *Building a Healthier America*, THE WHITE HOUSE, (Jul. 19, 2011), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/07/19/building-healthier-america>.

⁷ H.R. Doc. No. 115-5, at H374 (2017); EXEC. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY 2016, available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/policy-and-research/2016_ndcs_final_report.pdf.

⁸ 21 U.S.C. § 1703(c).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*