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Issa says Obama administration is 'one of most corrupt'

By [Philip Rucker](#)
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, January 2, 2011; 7:33 PM

The Republican congressman who is taking over responsibility for congressional oversight called [President Obama's](#) administration "one of the most corrupt administrations" on Sunday and predicted that the investigations he is planning over the next two years could result in about \$200 billion in savings for U.S. taxpayers.



U.S.'s Issa Plans to Focus on Greater Fed Transparency

Dec. 9 (Bloomberg) -- U.S. Representative Darrell Issa, incoming chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, talks about the need to ensure the Federal Reserve is more transparent in its actions. Issa, a California Republican speaking with Peter Cook on Bloomberg Television's "InsideTrack," also discusses tax policy and his willingness to work with President Barack Obama. (Source: Bloomberg)

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[Rep. Darrell Issa](#) (R-Calif.), the incoming chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, was bullish in laying out his agenda for the new Congress with Republicans in control of the House.

Issa, who as chairman [will have subpoena power](#), said he will seek to ferret out waste across the federal bureaucracy. While he used fiery rhetoric in describing the Obama administration in a series of

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television interviews Sunday, he said he will focus on wasteful spending, not the prosecution of White House officials.

Asked on "Fox News Sunday" about reports that the White House is staffing up on lawyers to prepare for his oversight hearings, Issa said: "They're going to need more accountants."

"It's more of an accounting function than legal function," Issa said. "It's more about the inspector generals than it is about lawyers in the White House. And the sooner the administration figures out that the enemy is the bureaucracy and the wasteful spending, not the other party, the better off we'll be."

[Rep. Elijah E. Cummings](#) (D-Md.), who as ranking Democrat on Issa's committee will be the administration's chief defender during oversight investigations, criticized Issa for his [partisan](#) tone.

"I couldn't help but think about the fact he has called this president the most corrupt in history," Cummings said on CNN's "State of the Union," referencing a comment Issa made to radio host [Rush Limbaugh](#) last fall but has since dialed back.

"Keep in mind, Issa will have subpoena power to subpoena almost anybody he wants to," the congressman from Baltimore said. "And that's a problem when you come to these conclusions before you even bring people in. . . . I think that we're just going to have to be careful with this power."

Issa also was sharply critical of Attorney General [Eric H. Holder Jr.](#), stopping short of calling for his resignation. He said the Justice Department has not properly investigated the publication of thousands of classified diplomatic cables by [WikiLeaks](#) founder Julian Assange.

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Issa said Holder should prosecute Assange as a criminal. "I think [Holder] needs to realize that, for example, WikiLeaks, if the president says, 'I can't deal with this guy as a terrorist,' then he has to be able to deal with him as a criminal," Issa said on "Fox News Sunday." "Otherwise, the world is laughing at this paper tiger we've become."

"He's hurting this administration," Issa said of Holder. "If you're hurting the administration, either stop hurting the administration or leave."

Issa said he plans to lead [bipartisan](#) investigations on food and drug safety, as well as Medicare fraud.

"We can save \$125 billion in simply not giving out money to Medicare recipients that don't exist for procedures that didn't happen," Issa said on CBS's "Face the Nation." "These are real dollars. Ten percent of the deficit goes out in wasted money - money that



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doesn't get one person health care in Medicare."

On the CNN show, Issa said: "When I look at waste, fraud and abuse in the bureaucracy and in the government, this is like steroids to pump up the muscles of waste."



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With new influence, Issa recasts self as Washington's whistleblower

By [Philip Rucker](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, December 18, 2010; 9:33 PM

[Rep. Darrell Issa](#) is finally getting what he has long craved: subpoena power. From his new perch atop the committee responsible for oversight investigations, the California Republican will be able to demand any document he wishes and summon anybody to appear before him - no small thing for a man who recently referred to [President Obama](#) as "one of the most corrupt presidents in modern times."



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Even so, there's one thing Issa says he won't subpoena: Barack Obama's birth certificate.

"Mine is not the committee that asks where the president was born," Issa said in an interview. "It doesn't ask what ministers that he went to think. All

that stuff is a distraction. I'm not the overseer of the president."

The minority's gadfly is trying to become the majority's measured man. Issa is working to shed his reputation as an omnipresent, henpecking nuisance whose shouting-forth turns into political headlines. Now empowered to vastly expand scrutiny across the federal government, including the White House, Issa wants to be seen as Washington's whistleblower - not the president's persecutor.

Issa is one of the most anticipated new leaders of a revived [Republican Party](#) intent on denying Obama a second term. He will have to balance his own temptation to embarrass the White House against the mission to ferret out waste, fraud and abuse.

If he overreaches, Issa knows his credibility will be zapped.

"Our committee is the committee of stopping government from taking away your liberties, government from exceeding its authority, government from keeping your business from expanding and growing, government from spending your money less efficiently than you would spend it yourself," Issa said.

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'An obligation'

Asked whether he would pursue political prosecutions of the administration, Issa said: "I'm sure going to try not to. If there's a violation of the Hatch Act [which prohibits federal employees from engaging in political activities], my committee will deal with it because we have an obligation, but I'm not getting up every day and trying to create one."

This is a particularly restrained approach coming from a man whose achievements have come with bombast and velocity. After Issa (pronounced EYE-suh) and his brother ran into trouble with the law for car theft (Issa's brother, William, claimed responsibility), Darrell Issa invested all of his savings, about \$7,000, in starting a car-alarm business that he grew into a behemoth. His flagship invention, the Viper, features Issa's deep voice ordering would-be thieves to "please step away from the car."

In 2003, when he tired of then-California Gov. Gray Davis (D), Issa spent \$2 million of his own money launching a seemingly quixotic but successful bid to recall him by ballot petition. But Issa was elbowed out by another outsize personality, [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), and tearfully withdrew from the crowded race to succeed Davis.

Last year, as the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee's [ranking member](#) and with his party out of power at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, Issa parlayed his proclivity for publicity to establish a far bigger platform than his position would normally afford.

Now that Issa, 57, a Lebanese American who grew up working-class but is one of the wealthiest House members, is set to assume the chairmanship, his makeover is well underway. There are flashes of his former self, such as the 8-by-10 inch wood-framed photo of one of his countless appearances on Fox News displayed on the window ledge of his dark office. But these days, Issa is turning down some requests for lengthy sit-down interviews, and he seems cautious in the few he finds time for.

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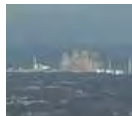
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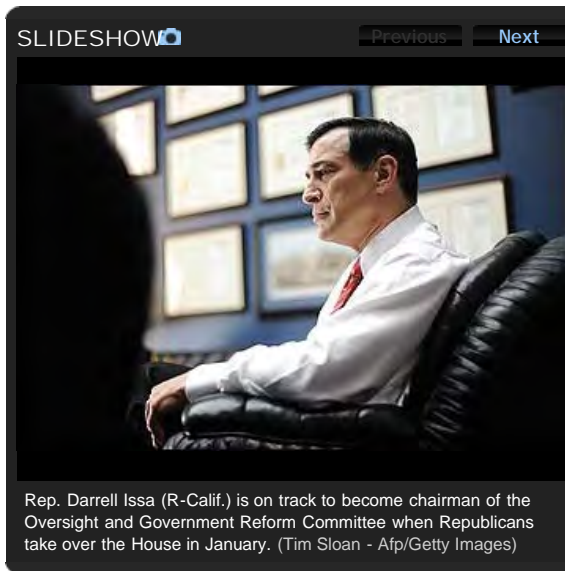
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With new influence, Issa recasts self as Washington's whistleblower

A change of tone

It was in October when Issa told [Rush Limbaugh](#) he thought Obama was "one of the most corrupt presidents in modern times." He later said he regretted the comment, and asked in the interview about his impressions of Obama, Issa said: "He's clearly smart. He's clearly focused and informed." Although, he said, "we don't summer together or anything."



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The White House is awaiting Issa's moves, aware that his is the perch from which the opposing party historically has launched attacks to weaken the president.

"We will of course support Congress in meeting its legitimate oversight responsibilities," White House spokesman Reid Cherlin said. "It's our hope that the

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administration and Congress can work together to ensure that this important function is not abused to score political points or for other improper purposes."

During [Bill Clinton's](#) second term, [Rep. Dan Burton](#) (R-Ind.) issued more than 1,000 subpoenas, even investigating the conspiracy that White House aide Vince Foster's suicide was a murder.

In the final two years of [George W. Bush's](#) administration, it was [Rep. Henry Waxman](#) (D-Calif.) who became a thorn in the side of the president. Waxman's committee probed Bush's ties to convicted [lobbyist](#) Jack Abramoff and whether his administration manipulated intelligence reports in the run-up to the Iraq war. (Issa called Waxman "a mean, angry man who wanted to berate people and bring them in front of Congress, and he did.")

"He can't just be a pit bull," said former congressman Tom Davis (R-Va.), who as committee chairman this decade mentored Issa. "There's the potential to discredit yourself by overreaching on some of these things . . . Darrell understands and will try to strike the right balance."

[Rep. Elijah E. Cummings](#) (D-Md.) was chosen last week to become the top Democrat on the committee, a position from which he said he will go "toe to toe" with Issa. In an interview before his appointment, Cummings called Issa "brilliant." He said Democrats should treat Issa's investigations like a chess game, always trying to be "seven steps ahead of him."

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"I want to make sure that this president is treated fairly and that there is not an abuse of the process," Cummings said. "I don't want to see the witch hunts. I don't want to see the fishing expeditions."

In the past, Issa has suggested investigating a 2008 voter-intimidation case involving the Black Panthers, as well as the White House's attempts to remove [Rep. Joe Sestak](#) (D) from a Pennsylvania Senate primary by offering him - by way of former President Bill Clinton - an unpaid position in the

administration.

Issa said he has not decided which investigations to launch in the new year. But he will almost assuredly continue the probe of Countrywide's VIP program that is suspected of giving elected officials reduced-rate mortgages and investigations into food safety and drug safety. "The intention is to have our first couple of hearings be those [bipartisan](#) issues we were already working on," Issa said.

Broader policy mandate

Issa plans to seize a far broader policy mandate than some of his predecessors to expose waste within the labyrinth of the federal bureaucracy, which is in line with his party's priority of cutting spending. He will give subpoena power to the dozens of inspectors general who serve as internal watchdogs at federal agencies.

Already, industries and other stakeholders who benefit from federal programs that could fall under Issa's microscope are readying their cases. Washington lawyers who help clients prepare for congressional investigations said business is booming.

"There's a whole cottage industry that's devoted to this, and if anything the [midterm elections](#) stimulated that part of the economy seriously," said Dean Zerbe, a former senior

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oversight aide to [Sen. Charles E. Grassley](#) (R-Iowa) who is managing director at Alliant Group.

Ted Hester, a senior partner at King and Spalding, added: "Clearly, the companies and the industries that are impacted by that are taking note . . . You can't pick up a paper these days without seeing reference to oversight, oversight, oversight."

Issa's tenacity and public persona, which has some bite, probably scares many of his likely witnesses. "But it shouldn't," said [Earl Devaney](#), a veteran inspector general at the Interior Department whom Obama tapped last year to oversee stimulus spending.

"I have found him to be tough, but fair," Devaney said. "If you appear before him, you ought to have your facts in order and be very honest and forthright with him. Or he will detect that you're not - and you'll be in trouble."

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