

# Issa's Investigations

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In an alternate universe in which Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), the new Chair of the House Oversight and Government Reform committee were a rational person with his country's best interests at heart, the news that he was going to [aggressively pursue investigations](#) would be welcome. Issa is interested in investigating a range of issues including corruption in the war in Afghanistan, WikiLeaks, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and the Food and Drug Administration. The American people deserve to know whether or to what extent corruption has become a problem in the war in Afghanistan, how a security lapse allowed WikiLeaks to get the documents it recently leaked and just how government agencies contributed to the mortgage and economic crises. This kind of accountability is essential to the functioning of a democracy; and investigations of this kind can be an important means of ensuring that accountability.

In this alternate universe, Issa's investigations would explore how the Democrats and Republicans together contributed to an economic crisis built on widespread deregulation, cutting corners and exploiting the hopes of ordinary Americans. We could learn how contracting processes in all areas of the federal government can become corrupt, leading to waste and cronyism. The lesson from these investigations would be clear for all Americans and would lead to meaningful reforms of our contracting process, regulatory agencies and financial system, partisan blame would be downplayed, as, in fairness to Issa, there are many Democrats who would love to place all the blame at the feet of former President George W. Bush and the Republican Party, and those seeking to cheat the American people would be chastened.

Unfortunately, there is little reason to believe that we live in that universe and even less evidence that Issa is either rational or has his country's best interests at heart. On the contrary, these investigations are almost certain to be little, if anything, more than further Republican assaults on President Obama and his administration. If Issa were serious about these investigations, or if it were possible to explore such serious issues in the current political context, the investigations would begin by recognizing that these are problems with roots at least as far back as the Bush administration and that Democrats and Republicans both share responsibility for them. This will not happen. Instead, the investigations will focus entirely on the Obama administration guaranteeing continued partisan fighting and no meaningful reforms or findings.

Rhetoric about smaller government, lower taxes and fiscal responsibility notwithstanding, the new Republican majority in Congress will continue to be drawn to the kind of partisan bickering that Issa is promising like moths to a flame. They will not be able to resist it as they confuse voter frustration with President Obama's inability to fix the country's economy quickly enough with desire, on the part of voters, for turning Congress into Ground Zero for partisan fighting and investigations offering nothing to ordinary Americans.

This may be a cynical interpretation of motives of the new leadership in the House of Representatives; and it may be somewhat unfair to judge this new leadership before it has had a chance to do anything, but there is some recent precedent to support this notion. The last time the Republicans controlled Congress while a Democratic president was in office was during the last six years of Bill Clinton's presidency. The Republicans spent a great deal of that time pursuing investigations, some legitimate and some less so. Much of the period from 1997-2000 was spent investigating the president's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, an issue that was of little, if any relevance, to most Americans, but on which the Republicans happily spent thousands of hours and millions of dollars. There is little reason to believe that this Republican Congress will be any less partisan or less interested in destroying the Democratic president than their party cohorts were in the late 1990s.

Significantly, the Republican strategy in the late 1990s was something of a disaster for that party. Bill Clinton, due to a strong economy, but also due to voter concern, overturning all of Washington over to the Republicans, was reelected easily in 1996. More tellingly, the Republicans lost seats in the House in the three elections following their victory in 1994. Thus, while this strategy was undoubtedly fun for some partisan Republicans, and a miserable experience for the Clinton administration, it was not a wise course of action for the Republican Party. In perhaps the first bit of political good news for the Democratic Party of the New Year, it appears as though the Republicans in the House of Representatives are poised to make similar mistakes in 2011 to what they did 15 or so years ago.