

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

May 18, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am writing to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study evaluating the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) efforts to prepare for the upcoming open enrollment season for the 2018 plan year. The Marketplace depends on high participation to succeed, and the vast majority of enrollees sign up for coverage during open enrollment. Therefore, HHS's planning for and administration of the open enrollment season is critical for the Marketplace's success.

According to a report in the *Washington Post*, the Trump Administration halted outreach efforts during the last phase of the open enrollment season that began in November 2016. The *Post* reported that "the White House instructed the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which oversees much of the [Affordable Care Act]'s implementation, to withdraw all communications contracts, marketing plans and advertising set for between [January 26] and the end of January."¹ A Department spokesperson later confirmed that the Agency cancelled about \$4 - 5 million in ads set to run over the final weekend before the close of open enrollment, and claimed that these cost savings "will be returned to the U.S. Treasury."²

The Administration's actions hampered overall enrollment in the Marketplaces, as the final deadline for open enrollment has in the past been the second-biggest day for signups.³ Research has shown that the last week of open enrollment also tends to draw younger enrollees,

¹ *White House stops ads, outreach for last days of 2017 ACA enrollment*, Washington Post (Jan. 26, 2017).

² *Reversing course, Trump administration will continue Obamacare outreach*, Politico (Jan. 27, 2017).

³ See note 1.

whose participation is critical to the stability of the Marketplace and to keeping premiums affordable.⁴ This suspension of outreach and enrollment activities prior to the closing of the open enrollment season, combined with the January 20, 2017, Executive Order instructing agencies to use their authority to waive, defer, grant exemptions from, or delay provisions of the ACA, raises concern that the Administration is not fulfilling its duty to encourage enrollment in the Marketplaces.

Therefore, to help Congress better understand the efforts made to enroll individuals in the Marketplace during the open enrollment season (i.e., for plan year 2018), we request that GAO conduct a review that examines how HHS's preparations for and administration of the 2018 open enrollment season compare to those for the 2017 plan year, including the following questions:

1. What enrollment goals did HHS set for 2018? Did HHS meet its enrollment goals for 2018? If not, why not? Did HHS use 2017 enrollment figures as a benchmark or guide for planning for 2018 open enrollment? If not, why not?
2. How did HHS's efforts for 2018 open enrollment compare to those for 2017, including level of resources dedicated to support outreach efforts, advertising, targeted outreach to young adults, call center and Navigator support, and support and enhancement of HealthCare.gov?
3. How did 2018 Marketplace enrollment figures compare to those for 2017? What factors may have contributed to any notable difference in enrollment figures between 2017 and 2018?

Please contact Una Lee or Kevin McAloon with the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Democratic Staff at (202) 225-3641 if you have questions about this request.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member

⁴ See note 2.