

Senate Democrats Seek Transparency: Crow Asked to Disclose Gifts to Justice Thomas



The battle over ethics within the Supreme Court has taken a new turn as Democratic members of the Senate Judiciary Committee have called on Harlan Crow, a billionaire Republican donor, to provide a comprehensive account of any gifts or payments made to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his family. This move comes as part of the ongoing efforts by Democrats to address the court's ethics, a subject the justices themselves have shown little interest in regulating.

The request, led by Judiciary Committee Chair Dick Durbin and supported by the ten other Democratic members of the panel, urges Crow to disclose any items of value that exceed \$415. They specifically request information regarding gifts or payments made by Crow or his controlled entities to any of the nine Supreme Court justices. The senators also inquire about real estate transactions that may have benefited the justices.

In a letter to Crow, the senators emphasized the need for transparency and ethical standards for Supreme Court justices, especially in light of recent news reports that revealed undisclosed items of value associated with Justice Thomas. The senators set a May 22, 2023 deadline for Crow to provide the requested information.

This call for disclosure reflects a significant shift as Senate Democrats, wielding their subpoena powers, attempt to hold the Supreme Court accountable. The chamber's Democratic majority has been striving to enact legislation that strengthens ethical rules and standards applicable to the justices.

Time to fill a position? BCG Attorney Search can help you find the perfect candidate.

Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, also joined the effort by calling Crow to provide an account of the gifts in question. Last month, ProPublica, a nonprofit investigative news organization, reported that Thomas had failed to disclose opulent trips, including private plane travel and resort stays spanning two decades. These trips were reportedly financed by Crow, who has made substantial donations to conservative causes.

Furthermore, ProPublica disclosed that Crow had purchased three properties in Georgia, including the residence where Justice Thomas's mother lives. The report also revealed that Crow had covered private school tuition fees for one of Thomas's grandnephews. These revelations have sparked concerns about potential conflicts of interest and violations of ethical guidelines.

However, Justice Thomas has denied any wrongdoing regarding accepting travel from Crow. He maintains that he sought ethics advice from fellow justices and other members of the judiciary early on in his 32-year tenure on the Supreme Court. According to Thomas, he was informed that personal hospitality from close personal friends, without any business ties to the court, did not require disclosure.

Despite significant resistance from Republicans, congressional Democrats have been advocating for the implementation of a new ethics code that would apply to the Supreme Court. Currently, the court operates under different ethical regulations compared to other federal judges.

The request made by Senate Democrats for detailed disclosure of gifts to Justice Thomas marks a crucial moment in their pursuit of increased transparency and accountability within the Supreme Court. As the battle over the court's ethics intensifies, the outcome of this endeavor could have far-reaching implications for the future of judicial conduct and public trust in the land's highest court.