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Clarence Thomas

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Exclusive: House Oversight Dems call for investigation into loan Clarence Thomas used to buy luxury RV

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WASHINGTON – Democrats on the House Oversight Committee, led by Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., are calling on committee Chairman Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., to open an investigation into Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his failure to properly disclose a loan he received from a wealthy businessman.

The letter, first shared with USA TODAY, asks Comer to launch an investigation into a \$267,000 loan Thomas used to purchase a luxury RV. The loan appeared to have later been forgiven.

“We request that you initiate an investigation into United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’s apparent failure to report a loan converted into a cash gift of over \$200,000 from a wealthy businessman, a huge payment which was used to purchase a luxury Prevost Marathon motor coach,” the letter reads.

Thomas received the loan, which was reported by the New York Times in August, in 1999 from Anthony Welters, a healthcare executive and close friend of the Supreme Court justice. The RV Thomas purchased with the loan was equipped with a kitchen, leather seating, a bedroom and donned an orange flame motif and a pegasus painted on the back.

Welters told the New York Times that the loan was “satisfied” but Democrats from the Senate Finance Committee said in a report that Thomas never paid any “significant portion” of it, if any. The documents reviewed by the committee found that Welters forgave either most or all of the loan to Thomas, who never reported the loan in his

financial disclosures.

The Senate committee report, led by Chair Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said, "While additional documents pertaining to the loan agreement may exist, documents reviewed by Democratic staff suggest that Justice Thomas did not repay a significant portion of the loan principal."

Thomas' lawyer has disputed Wyden's account.

The letter describes the loan and Thomas' failure to disclose it as "astounding," and House Democrats point out that if the loan was forgiven, Thomas was required to report it in his tax returns and it is unclear if he did so.

"The episode also raises significant potential tax issues, given that under the Tax Code, as you know, Justice Thomas would have been required to report any debt forgiven as realized income on his personal income tax returns," the letter says.

House Oversight Democrats also took aim at House Republicans' impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden and allegations he financially benefited from his son, Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings. Comer has been heavily scrutinizing loans the president appeared to have made to his brother in 2017 and 2018 – both were later repaid.

In response, a spokesperson for the GOP-led committee told USA TODAY in a statement the letter is an "attempt to distract from the mounting evidence showing that Joe Biden benefited from his family selling the Biden brand around the world."

Given Republicans' focus on Biden's loans, House Oversight Democrats said they "can only assume and trust that you will be opening an investigation into the disclosure that a sitting Supreme Court Justice received a \$267,230 loan from a wealthy businessman that was never repaid and never disclosed in ethics filings," the letter continues.

Thomas found himself in hot water earlier this year after a report from ProPublica revealed he accepted lavish gifts from Harlan Crow, a billionaire and Republican mega-donor. The report and other future findings ignited an ethics scandal in the high court and spurred a debate over whether the Supreme Court should adopt a code of ethics for greater transparency.

Senate Democrats in the upper chamber's Judiciary Committee took a significant step in their ongoing probe into ethics reform in the Supreme Court last week, vowing to

subpoena Crow and other wealthy donors who provided lavish gifts and luxury travel to justices.