

UnitedHealth Is Spending Big on Trump Allies to Fix Its Washington Problems

The largest U.S. health insurer's Medicare business faces investigations and policy threats

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UnitedHealth, parent of UnitedHealthcare, has lost about 40% of its market value since April. PHOTO: STEVEN GARCIA/NURPHOTO/AP

As [UnitedHealth Group](#) UNH -0.45% decrease; red down pointing triangle faces government investigations and changes in federal payments that have hurt its results, it

is turning to an increasingly common Washington playbook: hiring [Donald Trump's](#) allies and trying to plead its case directly with top officials in his administration.

After The Wall Street Journal first reported in May that UnitedHealth faced a [criminal investigation](#) into its key Medicare business, it secured a meeting with senior Justice Department officials, including the attorney general's chief of staff, Chad Mizelle, where they discussed probes of the company, people familiar with the meeting said. Such meetings are unusual for a company facing an early-stage criminal investigation, former prosecutors said.

UnitedHealth Chief Executive Officer Stephen Hemsley recently met with White House chief of staff Susie Wiles to discuss Medicare and other issues, though the government investigations didn't come up in their conversation, a White House official said.



White House chief of staff Susie Wiles PHOTO: ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

And in the summer, Hemsley had dinner with the official overseeing Medicare, Chris Klomp, and discussed Medicare-plan billing policies and supplemental benefits offered under the private Medicare plans, among other topics, people familiar with the matter said.

UnitedHealth generated more than \$100 billion in revenue in 2023 from Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare data show. In Medicare Advantage, private insurers oversee federal benefits for seniors and disabled people.

UnitedHealth, parent of the largest U.S. insurer, has lost about 40% of its market value since April, in part over changes to Medicare-billing rules from the Biden administration that began to hurt its results. In May, Hemsley, the company's longtime chair and former chief executive, returned to the CEO job to help reverse the slide.

The company also was grappling with the aftermath of the [public murder](#) of Brian Thompson, the chief executive of its insurance unit, in December.

Since then, Hemsley has sketched out plans for a business recovery and has seen some nascent improvement in the stock price, though the Washington issues remain an overhang for the company.



Brian Ballard, a top fundraiser for the president PHOTO: GABRIELLA DEMCZUK FOR WSJ

UnitedHealth's effort to address those issues underscores the changing landscape for Washington influence in the Trump era. In the first half of this year, UnitedHealth spent more money on lobbying than it ever has in a comparable time frame, the company's disclosures show. It increased its spending on lobbyists and lawyers with deep ties to President Trump's administration, including Brian Ballard, a top fundraiser for the president, and Jesse Panuccio, who was a senior Justice Department official in Trump's first term.

Its \$7.7 million in spending in the first half of 2025 about doubled its lobbying budget for the same period last year, while the spending of such rivals as [Humana](#) and [Cigna](#)

[Group](#) rose slightly. Ballard's firm, which began representing UnitedHealth in 2024, became its highest-paid outside lobbyist, disclosure records show.

In ongoing litigation with a major shareholder, UnitedHealth in July also swapped out a team of lawyers at WilmerHale, a law firm Trump has criticized, for the president's personal lawyer, securities litigator Robert Giuffra, and colleagues from his firm, Sullivan & Cromwell.

Investors are specifically worried about how the Trump administration will treat billing practices for the Medicare business, which is central to UnitedHealth's hopes of improved profits and growth. Mehmet Oz, chief of the agency that oversees Medicare, [has promised a crackdown](#) on some of the tactics used by insurers, including UnitedHealth, on top of the earlier changes.

UnitedHealth also has sought meetings with Trump himself, though it hasn't secured one yet. The company is seeking in particular to resolve the government investigations, people familiar with the matter said.

"The Administration routinely meets with insurers to deliver on the President's mandate of improving healthcare and lowering costs for everyday Americans," Kush Desai, a White House spokesman, said.

In a statement, UnitedHealth said: "Public policy shapes healthcare across America, and it's our responsibility to engage with the administration and Congress at all levels to improve patient access and affordability," it said, adding that is especially true now "as critical decisions are being made." A spokesman also said its lobbying spending varies from year to year.

UnitedHealth executives told Wall Street analysts that they have "been engaged and collaborative with the administration giving management a sense of having a seat at the table," according to an investor note to [Morgan Stanley](#) clients last week. UnitedHealth notched a Washington victory in August when the Justice Department allowed its long-delayed deal to acquire the home-health provider Amedisys to close after divestitures.



Jesse

Panuccio, who was a senior Justice Department official in President Trump's first term. PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

Lobbying spending often increases from year to year, but 2025 is setting a record, with many companies spending far more and hiring lobbyists close to Trump as they try more-aggressive strategies to get results, said Anna Massoglia, a researcher who tracks such spending.

“It’s a bit more nuanced now that you can curry favor with the president, the president’s family and their allies directly,” she said. “Companies and other organizations are trying to court the new administration and figure out a strategy to win them over.”

When the Journal reported in May that the Justice Department’s [criminal-fraud unit](#) was examining UnitedHealth’s Medicare business, the company initially said it hadn’t been notified of a probe and defended the integrity of its Medicare Advantage program.

UnitedHealth then arranged the meeting with senior Justice Department officials including Mizelle. Panuccio, the former senior Justice Department official whom UnitedHealth had hired, helped set it up, people familiar with the matter said. The discussion covered a number of topics including ongoing probes, the people said. UnitedHealth also faces civil and antitrust investigations.

In a [July 24 securities filing](#), the company said it had proactively contacted the Justice Department and “begun complying with formal criminal and civil requests” from the

agency. UnitedHealth said it had full confidence in its practices and was committed to working cooperatively through the process.

Former Justice Department officials said it was unusual for senior leaders in the department to discuss ongoing investigations with the companies or people under investigation. “You don’t want to give anyone a heads-up,” said Barbara McQuade, a former U.S. attorney for eastern Michigan.

Panuccio, now a partner at the Boies Schiller Flexner law firm, didn’t respond to a request for comment.

The criminal investigation into UnitedHealth is ongoing, people familiar with the matter said.

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