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Opening Statement
Chairman Gerald E. Connolly
Subcommittee on Government Operations
Briefing with the Inspector General for the Department of Labor
June 1, 2020

I want to thank Scott Dahl, the Inspector General of the Department of Labor, and his team for joining us today.

This briefing continues the series of briefings held by the Subcommittee on Government Operations to look at the important work of Inspectors General in conducting oversight of the federal government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Inspectors General are more important to this nation than ever.

Congress enacted the largest stimulus package in this nation's history in the midst of a global pandemic in which federal officials have failed to take a meaningful leadership role.

Inspectors General positions were statutorily designed by Congress to be outside of politics.

Congress has the responsibility to ensure that IGs are able to conduct their work free from political influence and threat of retaliation for simply doing their job.

Today we hosting the IG with oversight of unemployment insurance and worker safety standards — two incredibly important issues amid this pandemic.

As you know, the CARES Act included a massive expansion of unemployment compensation to include \$600 per week in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, a 13-week extension of benefits, expansion of benefits to the self-employed and part-time workers, and various waivers that allow states to get benefits in the hands of the unemployed as quickly as possible.

Last month, the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General released its Pandemic Response Oversight Plan.

DOL OIG's oversight will focus on various areas including the administration of unemployment benefits and the enforcement of workplace standards that employers are legally required to follow.

Inspector General Dahl has already issued an advisory report identifying concerns regarding implementation of the unemployment provisions in the CARES Act.

The report highlighted the Department of Labor's previous problems with managing stimulus funds during disasters and the implications for its coronavirus pandemic response given the unprecedented amount of funds appropriated in the CARES Act.

Inspector General Dahl's work will also be critical to help expose improper payments and fraud schemes that rob funding and resources from the people who need it most.

Congress and the public will also look to Inspector General Dahl to evaluate the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's efforts to protect people on the front lines of the pandemic, especially those with increased exposure risk.

While IGs do more than save taxpayer dollars, I think it's important to highlight that in the area of unemployment insurance fraud and improper payments, last year the DOL IG returned \$33 for every \$1 invested in its operations.

IGs fight for taxpayers and speak truth to power. We need to make sure they have expertise and acumen — not blind political loyalty.

I was proud to join with Chairwoman Maloney to introduce legislation to strengthen the independence of IGs and protect them from political retaliation.

It is especially important to me that any legislation explicitly states that an IG can only be removed for good cause with documentation to support the reason, something the President has not been able to provide in removing the IGs of the Intelligence Community and, most recently, the State Department.

I am also a proud sponsor of bipartisan legislation to hold IGs more accountable through increased transparency of the Committee charged with investigating wrongdoing within the IG community.

We protect IGs because they are sources of accountability and credibility. With those additional protections, we must ensure federal IGs are purer than driven snow.

Ensuring the independence of Inspectors General and their ability to work free from political retaliation is the best way to safeguard the trillions of taxpayer dollars that will be spent in response to the coronavirus crisis.

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