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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Chairman Gerald E. Connolly

**Hearing on “Overseeing the Overseers: Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency @
10 Years”**

Subcommittee on Government Operations

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Among the most important and misunderstood jobs in our federal government is that of the federal inspectors general. These unique federal employees straddle the executive and legislative branches and serve as a critical component of effective oversight. IGs, better known by the public as “federal watchdogs,” help Congress uncover waste, fraud, and abuse at federal agencies, and they help agencies find efficiencies that can improve service to the American public.

IGs have served in this sometimes unpopular role for more than 40 years. In fiscal year 2017 alone, the IGs identified \$32.7 billion in potential savings across the federal government, as documented in the nearly 4,000 reports released. IGs have also recovered \$21.9 billion from settlements and civil judgments resulting from nearly 22,000 investigations. For American taxpayers, that means that for every dollar spent to fund offices of inspectors general, they can expect about a \$22 return.

And IGs do more than save the federal government money—they improve agency safety, call balls and strikes on agencies that fail to follow established and fair processes and procedures, and they perform work that has the potential to save lives, like the U.S. Agency for International Development IG’s work examining the lessons learned from the agency’s Ebola response efforts.

Today’s hearing examines the role of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency plays in continuously improving the IG community. This interagency IG Council, known as CIGIE, serves as a hub of oversight, professionalization, and information sharing across the IG community.

Eleven years ago, Congress established CIGIE by merging a council for the smaller IGs and one for the larger IGs. CIGIE began operations in 2009, making this CIGIE’s 10-year anniversary.

The progress CIGIE has made over the last decade is commendable. CIGIE tapped its talented workforce to create Oversight.gov, a one-stop shop for all reports issued by any of the 74 offices of inspectors general. This online tool allows the public and Congress to look across agency boundaries and identify top management challenges across the government. This tool also allows for real time identification of issues that plague the federal government and give us, as Congress, a chance to generate enterprise solutions.

We are here today to find ways to help CIGIE build on these successes and examine ways to further explore efficient community-wide solutions that increase the independence of the IG community. After all, the community whose mission is to find efficiencies across government should challenge itself to find those same opportunities at home. I believe that CIGIE’s leadership can advance these goals.

Most importantly, this hearing will probe whether CIGIE is effectively performing its most important function, watching the watchdogs. The unique nature of the IG position makes oversight of the IGs complicated. Currently, the Integrity Committee, which operates within CIGIE, is charged with investigating allegations of wrongdoing against IG

officials. The Integrity Committee has, at times, operated without transparency, which is in contrast with the values of an IG community, whose greatest strength is sunlight. I often say that IGs, the overseers of agencies, need to be as purer than the driven snow, because one hint of impropriety could taint the work of all IGs.

This issue is personal to me. Since 2014, I have been asking CIGIE and the Integrity to explain to me why a complaint of wrongdoing that I sent to CIGIE about allegations of gross misconduct by an IG was not referred for further investigation. The IG in question reportedly issued his own response to CIGIE, but both the IG and CIGIE have refused for years to provide me with any additional information, including a copy of that letter.

Just last week, I sent the IG yet another request for that letter. I have also asked the Integrity Committee for any information about their decision not to refer the matter, but I have yet to receive an acceptable response. Today I hope to find answers to the questions I have been asking and introduce reforms to ensure that no other Member of Congress is treated with similar indifference.

I hope no other Member of Congress will get the same treatment I have received from CIGIE. That is why I will be introducing legislation today to make the Integrity Committee more transparent and responsive to Congress. When a Member of Congress is seeking additional information from the body that oversees Inspectors General, we should not be told to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. I want to thank Chairman Cummings as well as my good friend Representative Meadows for co-sponsoring this good government bill to ensure Congress is able to conduct oversight of OIGs when needed.

I also have particular concerns about offices of inspectors general who share their IT servers with the agencies that they oversee. Congress deliberately created the IGs 40 years ago to be independent from the agencies they oversee. While we trust agencies would not inappropriately access investigative materials created by their IG, I am concerned about even an appearance of potential impropriety and risk to IG independence. I think CIGIE has been working in this area and could play a pivotal role in finding a collaborative, cross-community solution to this problem.

In celebrating 10 years of CIGIE, we should also examine CIGIE's role in filling IG vacancies by helping the President, agency heads, and Congress to find qualified candidates for vacant IG positions. Today we will examine whether those responsibilities need clarification or reinforcement. Too often, administrations do not understand the role of the inspector general and attempt to infuse politics into the selection process for a new IG. Or worse.

Instead of filling a vacant IG position at the Department of Education with a qualified candidate, this Administration sought to remove the acting inspector general and replace her with the deputy general counsel. The Project on Government Oversight politely called the effort "ethically suspect" and a move that "should greatly concern taxpayers." This hearing will explore how and when IGs can be removed, ensuring that Congress is provided appropriate notice of any changes to who serves in these vital positions—even when in an acting capacity.

Finally, this hearing will examine recent transparency measures CIGIE and its Integrity Committee have adopted in its periodic reporting and explore options for codifying these reforms.

We seek to ensure that the watchdog's watchdog remains above reproach by increasing the transparency and access in the Integrity Committee's operations.

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