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House of Representatives

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Ranking Member Robert Garcia

Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

Hearing on “Help Wanted: Law Enforcement Staffing Challenges at the Border”

June 6, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for convening this hearing.

I hope that we can all commend the Biden-Harris Administration for their actions to prevent chaos and serious disorder at our border following the expiration of Title 42 – which I believe was the right decision.

I remind the Committee, that as a proud immigrant myself and a patriotic American, we can only have a humane and secure border if we also have legal pathways that let people come to contribute to our country. Immigrants make this country stronger. We are a nation of immigrants, and being anti-immigrant is anti-American.

Congressional Democrats and President Biden have taken clear actions to improve our border security. We have provided unprecedented resources to the men and women who protect our borders, and President Biden has implemented numerous policies to bolster their health and well-being while they enforce border security.

Republicans, on the other hand, have opposed greater funding to frontline agencies, including Customs and Border Protection. Republicans have called to defund our federal law enforcement agencies, ridiculously claiming they have been weaponized to further their own political aspirations.

Democrats know we have a responsibility to support the wellbeing of all federal employees. And as Mayor of Long Beach California, I worked closely with and was proud to have the support of my local police force. So today, I am glad to be addressing the concerns of frontline federal law enforcement agents.

I believe we have a responsibility to support all federal employees who serve our country, from the Department of Homeland Security to the United States Postal Service. However, I am very concerned that we are holding a hearing today on the basis of a badly flawed report, and with a very problematic witness.

Mr. Cuffari, is a witness who repeatedly refused to comply with this Committee’s requests for meetings and information and he sought to block congressional oversight at every turn. It is actually ironic that we are dealing with Mr. Cuffari’s politicized and problematic report, given his own struggles with staff morale challenges.

On September 23rd, 2022, a letter was published that was drafted by, “concerned DHS OIG employees representing every program office at every grade level.” The letter claimed that Inspector General Cuffari, “no longer has the support of his workforce,” and that staff fear retaliation if they speak up about the multitude of issues at the office. Staff made the startling claim that DHS OIG “will continue to fail under [IG Cuffari’s] disastrous leadership.”

The concerns about this witness go on and on—from questions about his educational credentials, his resigning under ethical concerns earlier in his career, allegations of deliberately delaying essential oversight reports, and altering and covering up critical investigatory facts.

We also know that Inspector General Cuffari is currently under investigation by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency—or CIGIE—for his problematic actions. But rather than cooperate with legitimate oversight efforts, Inspector General Cuffari has filed a lawsuit against CIGIE in a desperate attempt to escape scrutiny or consequences for his failures and transgressions.

It is unacceptable that the individual entrusted to investigate fraud, waste, and abuse in our 3rd largest executive department believes that he is above the law, believes that his office is above scrutiny from Congress, and believes that he is beyond reproach for his own potential perpetrations of fraud, waste, and abuse.

Under Inspector General Cuffari’s leadership—Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General has developed a pattern of flawed and misleading investigations, including a failure to report rampant sexual misconduct and harassment at DHS, and a failure to investigate and disclose to Congress missing Secret Service text messages from the January 6th insurrection.

I would also like to address the report on which this hearing is based—a report that is misleading, nonrepresentative of the broader agency, and deeply flawed. The DHS Office of Inspector General claimed that the purpose of their work was to gain insight into staffing. Instead, the report made sweeping generalizations about morale at CBP and ICE.

The report is replete with mathematical errors and misleading tables and graphs. DHS OIG even states that their work was conducted in accordance with, “generally accepted government auditing standards, with the exception of data reliability.” I don’t know about you, but “With the exception of data reliability” seems like a pretty big exception to me.

We need an Inspector General in place at DHS who is able to perform high-quality audit work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, or we will never have the accountability and transparency that we need and deserve from this fundamental agency born out of one of the most harrowing events in our nation’s history.

I expect better. I look forward to this hearing only for the opportunity for our members to raise longstanding concerns with Mr. Cuffari. **We have serious challenges to address at our borders, and I look forward to building solutions to address them. But Mr. Cuffari is not the messenger Congress should heed for such essential work.**

I yield back.

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