

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

“Oversight of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency”

July 23, 2024

An important role of this Subcommittee is to see to the effective, efficient, and fair functioning of the executive branch. The 74 Inspectors General across the federal government are central to that effort, which is why we have called this hearing today.

Inspectors general operated for two centuries in our military before Congress extended the concept to civilian agencies with the *Inspector General Act of 1978*. This Act initially established 12 inspectors general across various departments and offices. In their creation, Congress was careful to emphasize the apolitical, non-partisan nature of inspectors general. On a bipartisan basis, Congress designed these positions to focus on eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse; to encourage efficient agency operations, and to tackle wrongdoing without regard to partisanship or politics.

In 2008, to ensure robust oversight of Inspectors General, Congress passed the *Inspector General Reform Act* with near unanimous bipartisan support. This bill established the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, colloquially known as CIGIE.

The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, as the name implies, is made up of all 74 Inspectors General, including those appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, those appointed by their affiliated agency heads, and one IG, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, appointed by the President alone.

CIGIE was formed with the laudable goal of professionalizing the IG community so they can better address government-wide integrity, economy, and effectiveness issues. They do so by training staff, proposing legislation, and recommending new inspectors general for vacant positions. Perhaps most importantly, CIGIE holds IGs themselves accountable through the Integrity Committee.

A key part of CIGIE’s duties as a watchdog organization is to issue regular reports to Congress, as well as to issue reports on the results of their investigations into allegations of IG misconduct. Unfortunately, Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, myself included, have found themselves vexed by CIGIE’s lack of expediency in completing and disclosing the results of their Integrity Committee investigations.

For example, since early 2022, Members of Congress have raised to CIGIE severe concerns regarding the ethics, credibility, and political independence of the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari, originally nominated by Donald Trump in 2019.

Alarming, these concerns included a failure to report rampant sexual misconduct and harassment at DHS and a failure to investigate and disclose missing Secret Service texts relating to the events of January 6th, 2021.

Three years into his tenure, a majority of the lawyers in the DHS Office of the Inspector General had left, many of whom cited dysfunction and abuses of power stemming from Cuffari's leadership as the catalyst for their departure.

Most concerning though is Mr. Cuffari's failure to comply with the House Oversight Committee's longstanding investigation into his misconduct, citing a myriad of spurious claims in response to numerous oversight letters.

Over the course of his tenure, at least 8 investigative letters have been sent to IG Cuffari over his inadequate performance and unwillingness to cooperate with Congressional investigations. Mr. Chair, I ask for unanimous consent to submit these letters, sent between 2020 to 2024, as well as two of Mr. Cuffari's responses, sent on February 1, 2024, and August 31, 2023, into the record.

Despite these mounting issues, we still lack a clear understanding of the status or results of CIGIE's investigation into IG Cuffari, even after a years-long process and a highly suspect \$1 million dollar-plus settlement between Cuffari and one of his employees.

If CIGIE is to be an effective watchdog, it must be transparent to Congress. I applaud the steps CIGIE has taken recently to implement a new transparency policy—but more is needed.

And while the Council must be improved, that does not mean it is replaceable or expendable. Alongside its oversight functions, CIGIE plays a valuable role in training staff, proposing congressional measures to improve government efficiency, and offering itself as a forum for learning best practices. The Council as we know it cannot and must not be recreated under the auspices of another agency.

The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency has achieved important results. For example, after the CARES Act vested CIGIE with oversight responsibilities of pandemic spending, it stood up the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee—also known as PRAC.

That committee coordinates the efforts of 20 inspectors general to promote transparency and conduct data-driven oversight of the \$5 trillion Congress invested in this nation to address the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Ultimately, CIGIE cannot carry out this work and its mission if it does not remain absolutely independent—especially from political pressure.

If oversight of Inspectors General moved under the purview of another department or to agencies headed by political appointees, the independence of IGs could be permanently undermined.

We have already seen Presidential administrations in the past fire inspectors general that release reports, engage in audits, or carry out investigations that they find politically inconvenient. Undermining the independence of IGs would empower future presidents that aim to thwart oversight and abuse their powers to do so as well.

Today's conversation presents an opportunity to learn more about how we can improve the Council, where it has erred in the past, and ideas to reform it into a stronger organization.

But it is also an opportunity to appreciate the ability of independent oversight to make our country better. Respect for the rule of law and a culture of accountability are the bread and butter of this Subcommittee. I look forward to doing our part in this hearing today to preserve those values and expectations.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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