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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

**Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member**

### Hearing on "Empowering Agency Oversight: Views from the Inspector General Community"

**January 15, 2014**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important and bipartisan hearing. Our 72 Inspectors General are critical to ensuring that federal agencies and programs are providing the best possible value to the American taxpayer.

Our Committee, this Congress, and our nation depend on the audits and investigations IGs conduct to ensure that funds are spent effectively and efficiently, to identify issues requiring additional oversight, and to craft legislation to strengthen the operations of our government.

It is critical that Inspectors General and their professional staffs have the statutory authorities they need to cast critical eyes over agencies and their programs. It is our Committee's responsibility to review existing authorities, as we are doing today, to determine whether they enable the IGs to do the jobs we have entrusted to them.

In 2008, our Committee passed the Inspector General Reform Act authored by Congressman Jim Cooper to ensure that Inspectors General are appointed solely on the basis of their professional qualifications without regard to party affiliation. That legislation also eliminated bonuses for Inspectors General and adjusted compensation accordingly.

That legislation also required the President's annual budget submission to identify the budget request for each Inspector General office as a separate line item, and it created in statute the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. The Act was signed into law by President Bush in October 2008.

Today, we will hear testimony from the Inspectors General at the Department of Justice, the Peace Corps, and the Small Business Administration. Each presents thoughtful recommendations to strengthen the authorities available to IGs government-wide. Each also addresses unique issues encountered in their interactions with the agencies they oversee.

I strongly support several recommendations we will discuss today. In fact, H.R. 2146, the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act, which Chairman Issa authored and which I co-

sponsored, passed the House in the last Congress and included provisions to exempt IGs from the Paperwork Reduction Act and the Computer Matching and Privacy Act. These are the kinds of bipartisan steps we should be taking to strengthen our IGs.

I have concerns, however, with some proposals that have been raised. In particular, I do not support granting our Inspectors General unfettered power to subpoena individuals to compel them to provide testimony. This would give to the IGs powers that even the FBI does not have, and the use of that authority could, in some circumstances, impede criminal investigations and raise significant civil liberties concerns.

To me, the single most important thing we can do to support the Inspectors General is to provide them with the resources necessary to carry out the authorities they have. I am deeply concerned by the impact of budget cuts on all of our Inspectors General. The Small Business Administration's Inspector General, for example, has a double-digit vacancy rate and an ongoing hiring freeze. The Department of Justice's Inspector General testified before the Senate last year that budget shortfalls had caused him to eliminate approximately 40 positions from his staff.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on ways to improve IG authorities as well as the impact that ongoing resource constraints have on their ability to conduct thorough investigations. I look forward to working with the Chairman all Committee Members to support the critical work of our IGs. Thank you.

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