

Statement for the Record of Congressman Ted W. Lieu
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
Markup of H.R. 1847, the *Inspector General Protection Act*
March 27, 2019

I am grateful to Chairman Cummings and Ranking Member Jordan for recognizing the importance of strengthening our nation’s inspectors general by bringing H.R. 1847, the *Inspector General Protection Act*, to a full committee markup. I would also like to express my gratitude to Congressman Jody Hice for his leadership and partnership on this bill.

Since Congress passed the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, inspectors general have played a crucial role in our democracy. These government watchdogs root out waste, fraud, mismanagement, and abuse at all levels of government – saving the American taxpayer billions of dollars annually and ensuring government programs benefit the People. One Government Accountability Office study concluded that the 73 Offices of Inspectors General saved taxpayers \$43.3 billion in 2009, marking roughly an \$18 return for every dollar invested in our nation’s inspectors general.¹ By making inspectors general independent from the agencies they oversee, Congress signaled the importance of nonpartisan oversight that defines their role today.

Unfortunately, administrations on both sides of the aisle have chronically undervalued inspectors general, as evidenced by persistent vacancies and underfunded budgets. According to the Project on Government Oversight, “Vacancies of permanent inspectors general is not a new problem or one that is unique to [the Trump] Administration; this issue has persisted for years under both Democratic and Republican leadership. The inspector general position at the

¹ Editorial Board, “A need for more inspector generals,” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2012.

Department of the Interior, for example, has lacked a nominee for 3,426 days—nine years—as of [July 12, 2018].²

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs also noted that, in addition to vacancies, “Another type of personnel action has the potential for doing significant damage to OIG independence if abused: placing an IG on indefinite paid or unpaid nonduty status (or administrative leave, as it is sometimes referred to).”³

Our bill, the *Inspector General Protection Act of 2019*, ensures the independence and integrity of our nation’s inspectors general by combatting two threats to these offices. First, H.R. 1847 requires notification to Congress in advance of an inspector general being placed on paid or unpaid non-duty status, or incurring a change in status. This ensures Congress is aware of any potential attempts to improperly sideline an inspector general. Second, the bill requires the President to report to Congress if an inspector general has not been nominated within 210 days after a vacancy occurs for the position, including the reasons a nomination has not been made and a target date for doing so. This reasserts Congress’ oversight role and allows Members to question – on an informed basis – the decision of any future administration to leave core offices vacant.

Once again, I thank the Committee for acting on this important issue, on a bipartisan basis, and look forward to working with the Chairman and Ranking Member to move this commonsense legislation forward.

² Rebecca Jones, “Pogo Urges President Trump to Fill Inspectors General Vacancies,” *Project on Government Oversight*, July 12, 2018.

³ “Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2015 Report of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate to Accompany S. 579.” *U.S. Government Publishing Office*, May 5, 2015.