

Statement of Congressman James R. Walkinshaw
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Member Day
December 17, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Garcia, for the opportunity to testify today before our committee. As a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, I believe these bills reflect Congress's responsibility to care for federal employees and ensure transparency and accountability.

My first priority is H.R. 5249, the Limit on Sweeping Executive Reorganization Act. This year, the Trump Administration has moved forward with sweeping, and at times illegal, executive branch reforms with little to no consultation with Congress. That should be a source of outrage for every member of this Committee. This legislation requires any major executive branch reorganization that cuts large numbers of federal employees, slashes budgets, or outsources core government functions to receive explicit approval from Congress. It establishes safeguards to protect federal workers, ensure transparency, and preserve the merit-based civil service system that has served the American people for more than a century. Congress has the primary constitutional authority to oversee the federal government, and I urge my colleagues to reclaim that authority rather than allow sweeping changes to proceed without accountability.

Next, I want to highlight H.R. 2180, the Keep the Watchdogs Running Act. Inspectors General are the federal government's primary independent mechanism for identifying waste, fraud, and abuse, issues the Administration claims are a top priority. Yet instead of strengthening that oversight, the Administration has repeatedly moved to weaken it. Early in the Administration, dozens of Inspectors General were fired. More recently, the Administration has attempted to defund the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), disguising this effort as a routine consequence of the government shutdown. This bill would ensure that Offices of Inspectors General can continue critical oversight work during a shutdown. Under current law, OIGs are often forced to halt non-essential operations during a shutdown even when the agencies they oversee continue to operate. The Keep the Watchdogs Running Act amends the Inspector General Act of 1978 to allow IGs to carry out necessary oversight whenever their agencies remain operational. Shutdowns should not be used as an excuse to suspend accountability. If my colleagues across the aisle are serious about rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse, I hope they will support this bill.

I'd also like to highlight H.R. 493, the FAIR Act. This bipartisan bill would provide federal employees with a 4.3 percent pay increase in calendar year 2026. The federal workforce is integral to the functioning of our government and the delivery of essential services across the country. Yet the Administration's actions over the past year have degraded that workforce, subjecting federal workers to incredible uncertainty and economic challenges amidst RIFs, a government shutdown, and an increasingly hostile work environment. In addition, according to

the Federal Salary Council, federal employees earned an average of 24.72 percent less than their private-sector counterparts in 2024.

Failing to offer competitive pay undermines recruitment, retention, and the overall quality of the civil service. That directly affects the government's ability to deliver services efficiently and effectively. The FAIR Act is a necessary step toward stabilizing the federal workforce and ensuring agencies can attract and retain the talent needed to serve the American people.

I'd also like to highlight H.R. 491, the Equal COLA Act. This legislation addresses long-standing inequities in how cost-of-living adjustments are calculated for federal retirees under the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System.

The Equal COLA Act would align annual COLAs for both CSRS and FERS retirees with the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, or CPI-W. This change would establish parity between the two retirement systems and ensure that all federal retirees receive adjustments that more accurately reflect the real cost of living.

Federal retirees should not face different standards based solely on the retirement system they happened to be enrolled in. This bill would create a fairer, more consistent approach to retirement benefits and help ensure that federal employees can retire with dignity after a lifetime of public service.

I'd also like to highlight H.R. 492, the Saving the Civil Service Act. This bipartisan legislation is designed to protect the federal workforce from politicization and political manipulation and to preserve the integrity of the merit-based civil service.

The bill would prevent any position in the competitive service created after September 30, 2020, from being reclassified outside of merit system principles without the express consent of Congress. It would also impose a cap on conversions to the frozen excepted service schedule, known as Schedule C, limiting such conversions to no more than one percent of an agency's workforce or five employees, whichever is greater.

In addition, the bill would require employee consent for any conversion and mandate reporting to Congress on all such actions. These safeguards are essential to ensuring that expertise, neutrality, and professionalism remain the foundation of the federal workforce, rather than political loyalty or patronage.

I'd also like to highlight H.R. 759, the Federal Firefighters Families First Act. This bill ensures that federal firefighters receive retirement benefits that fully reflect the demands of their service. Federal firefighters routinely work grueling schedules, including mandatory overtime, especially during emergencies and disasters. This bill would ensure that required overtime is counted toward retirement, bringing federal firefighters' benefits in line with their state and local

counterparts and fairly recognizing the sacrifices made by these public servants and their families.

Finally, I want to highlight H.R. 1670, the Family Building FEHB Fairness Act. Federal employees, like every American, should have the right to start and build a family on their own terms. President Trump promised to mandate coverage of IVF. If he and the Republican Party are serious about that position, they can act now to protect and expand access to IVF by supporting my bill. The Family Building FEHB Fairness Act modernizes the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program and ensures access to high-quality fertility coverage, helping make the federal government an employer of choice for talented Americans who want to serve their country while starting a family.