



Opening Statement of Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Jay Obernolte

Full Committee Hearing

*Protecting the American Taxpayer: Highlighting Efforts to Protect Against Federal
Waste, Fraud, and Mismanagement*

April 19, 2023

Good morning. I would like to begin today by thanking Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Lofgren for allowing myself and Ms. Foushee to lead this full committee hearing.

Today's hearing focuses on a topic of great importance to this committee: protecting the American taxpayer by working to expose federal waste, fraud, and mismanagement. Essentially, the role of the Office of Inspectors General.

Inspectors General have a strong historical precedent in our nation. IGs are meant to be the watchdogs for Congress and the American taxpayer. The independent oversight capability the IG wields to expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement is their core responsibility.

It is critical that the independence of Inspectors General is maintained. IGs are meant to be IN their parent agencies, but not OF their parent agencies or any administration. They are meant to be apolitical and set apart in order to do the hard task of publicly highlighting the flaws of their parent agencies. Helping to advance transparency and accountability within an administration is a difficult but necessary role that the IG leads.

Each agency has a different mission and goal, making it challenging to have a single, all-encompassing metric to evaluate the effectiveness of each IG. I hope this hearing will be an opportunity to discuss the potential metrics by which each office of the inspector general should be measured and where those offices currently stand.

This hearing is also a chance to highlight the important work done by each of the offices before us today. I particularly want to highlight the oversight work surrounding the growing threat to our cybersecurity and research integrity standards. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed technologies forward and implemented remote capabilities far sooner than any anticipated. Hearing from each of you today on the oversight efforts your agencies have taken to enhance cybersecurity standards and promote research integrity is particularly important.

I hope this topic can be effectively discussed as it relates to the security of passwords and protective internal practices of each agency. This is likely to be a discussion for future hearings, but I encourage conversations on this topic today as well.

Several of the agencies here today have received millions, if not billions, of federal dollars to advance research and development initiatives. Massive spending bills such as the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act have recently become law and provided agencies with new statutory mandates as well as R&D funds to advance innovation. More spending means more opportunities for mismanagement of

taxpayer funds, making the IG's role more important than ever. I would like to hear how each IG has already begun to provide oversight of these taxpayer funds, as well as future oversight plans in these areas. It is critical as new programs and funds are implemented that every proper measure is taken to safeguard them from fraud and misuse.

This hearing also serves as an opportunity for this committee to emphasize the various findings the IGs have reported on in areas that have raised considerable concern. Just a few issues we hope to address include the law enforcement presence and mitigation efforts of sexual assault and harassment allegations in the Antarctic; the extent of work from home policies in place; and various award and procurement issues as we move closer to the Congressional appropriations season.

At this time, I would like to welcome to our esteemed witnesses and thank you all for joining us. I am looking forward to a robust discussion with each of you. I am hopeful our conversation today will highlight the good work being done in accountability and transparency and help to strengthen your oversight and investigative efforts.